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"THE LATEST FORM OF INFIDELITY" EXAMINED.

A

LETTER

TO

MR. ANDREWS NORTON,

OCCASIONED BY HIS

"DISCOURSE BEFORE THE ASSOCIATION OF THE ALUMNI OF THE CAMBRIDGE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL,"

ON THE 19TH OF JULY, 1839.

BY AN ALUMNUS OF THAT SCHOOL.

Our guides must direct us, and yet if they fail, God hath not so left us to them, but he hath given us enough to ourselves, to discover their failings and our own duties. It is best to follow our guides, if we know nothing better; but if we do, it is better to follow the pillar of fire, than a pillar of cloud, though both possibly may lead to Canaan; — but then also it is possible that it may be otherwise. — JEREMY TAYLOR.

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LETTER.

Dear Sir,

The occasion, as you justly observe, which called forth your Discourse before the "Alumni of the Cambridge Theological School," was one of more than common interest. It was the first anniversary of an Association, composed of ministers whose principal bond of union is personal respect and friendship; who are united by the sympathies of education and of devotion to similar pursuits; but who neither claim authority over each others' faith, nor profess to regard uniformity of speculative opinion, as desirable, even if it were possible. Many of them have been fellow-students at the same school; a common interest in theology first brought them together, and has not since divided them; others are connected by habits of social and professional intercourse; and all, it is to be presumed, are engaged in the investigation of truth, without being restrained by a creed which they have agreed to support.

The relation, existing between the clergymen who were assembled on that day, has often been remarked as being of a rare and delightful character. It has been supposed that there were few bodies of men in the habit of meeting together, who combined more firmness of individual opinion with more guarded and delicate respect for every sincere expression of thought; who were more attached to the principle of perfect tolerance in matters of intellectual inquiry, or more consistent in its practical application; and who had more thoroughly learned the great lesson of wisdom, "in our own strivings after truth to give deserved honor to the strivings of our neighbor." In consequence of this, their mutual intercourse has been agreeable and salutary; they have shed light on each others' minds; they have warmed each others' hearts; the progress of truth has been advanced by their mutual endeavors; and it is seldom, indeed, that the widest differences of opinion have produced any interruption in the perfect bond of charity by which they are united. It is to be expected, of course, that men whose education, whose habits of mind, whose condition and pursuits in life, are, in many respects very similar, should arrive at certain common conclusions, in their independent researches after truth. This has, undoubtedly, been the case.

They agree in the rejection of many articles of faith, which have usually been held sacred in the Church; a traditional theology has taken no strong hold of their minds; they deem the simple truths of Christianity more important than the mysteries which have been combined with them; but the principle of their union has never been made to consist in any speculative belief; no test has been required as a condition of fellowship; the mere suggestion of such a course would be met only with a smile of derision. It is not as Unitarians, that they are united in friendly relations; those relations existed before the name of Unitarian was prevalent among us; and it is now disclaimed by many whom we can never think of but with sentiments of profoundest veneration and love. The common tie which holds them together is attachment to liberal Christianity; they value this, because it connects the enjoyment of religion with independence of mind, and enables them to search for truth, free from human dictation.

It must always be a beautiful spectacle to witness the union of a numerous body of men, whose relation with each other is so disinterested and holy. When we remember those disastrous ages of the Church, — so full of instruction and warning to the thoughtful student of history, — in which councils assembled for the punishment of heresy,

in which the questioner of prevailing opinions was doomed to expiate his crime by the fires of martyrdom, or to drag out a death-like existence under the ban of the hierarchy, — it cannot but be grateful to meet with an assembly of clergymen, who, in the consciousness that they are ecclesiastics, do not forget that they are men; who are more anxious to maintain a true liberty of thought, than any uniformity of creed; and who labor for the regeneration of society and the blessedness of the world, by the diffusion of the essential spirit of Christianity, rather than by the inculcation of the doctrines of a sect.

The Association, moreover, which you were called to address, is composed of the Alumni of a Theological School, which has always claimed the favor of the community, on account of its freedom from an exclusive spirit, its confidence in the safety and utility of thorough inquiry in all matters of faith, its attachment to the principles of a liberal theology, and its renunciation of the desire to impose articles of belief on the minds of its pupils. The strongest plea, on which it has relied for patronage has been expressed in language like the following. "It is not the variety of opinions which have been drawn from the same records of faith, nor the number of sects into which the Church universal has been partitioned, which have

been injurious to the Christian cause, so much as the manner in which those opinions have been maintained, and the outrageous pretensions which those sects have, with hardly an exception, advanced. The lovers of a free or liberal theology, feel it impossible that they could submit to any such dominion. They know it to be not in the nature of things, that any man can be worthy of all this deference, or can be entitled to have all his opinions respected and adopted as infallible interpretations of an infallible law. They know of no mere man who ever lived by whose name they would be willing to be called, or whose implicit disciples they would be willing to be considered. They refuse the name of Socinus with as much promptness as they would the name of Calvin; not because they are afraid of being thought to hold those opinions of Socinus which have been generally accounted obnoxious, but because they conceive no man to be worthy of the honor which they render to Christ alone, and because they will not bind themselves, nor suffer themselves to be bound by the adoption of any man's name, to become in any degree responsible for his character or sentiments, subservient to his views, or obedient to his dictates. The submission which they will not yield to one man, they will not yield to any one body of men. They

feel that they cannot and must not surrender the birth-right of their mental and religious freedom to one or to many, to a name, or a church, or a catechism, but that they must keep their minds open at all hours to receive fresh air and new light, and in a position to profit readily and unrestrainedly by the result of any examination. Entertaining such views as these of the sacredness of religious freedom, they would never call on the instructers of a school of theology to subscribe allegiance to a long list of doctrines, but would rather select those men for teachers, who, wise, honest, and competent, would refuse bondage, even as they themselves would refuse it. A liberal theology is generous as well as free. It will no more attempt to enslave, than it will submit to be enslaved. It allows all Christian privileges to all Christian men, and it acknowledges as Christian men all who seriously take the name of Christ, hearken to his instructions, and consider themselves amenable to his laws. It does not take a particular form of doctrine, and place it on a pedestal, and proclaim, 'This is the golden image; fall down and worship it, or be cast into the fiery furnace.' It reveres truth; it entertains its own views of what truth is, and it would have all men come to the knowledge of it; but it would effect this by invitation, and not by denunciation; by

persuading men to examine, leaving them free to choose, and granting to each one his perfect right to his own determination, and his perfect safety in it, if he has come to it in a proper temper, and by a just use of all his means. It regards spiritual pride and arrogance as worse than false doctrine, and as the prolific seed of heresies and schisms and infidelity. Exclusiveness is its utter aversion. Exclusive Christianity is its unspeakable wonder. It regards exclusive religion as quite as great a contradiction as an exclusive God. — I believe that in the whole of the Western Continent, from its southernmost cape to the northern circle, there is but one spot, a green spot, in which such a theology is publicly taught. I believe that in one theological seminary only, in this hemisphere, the Divinity School at Cambridge, do religious liberality and charitableness, conjointly with seriousness, form the spirit of theological instruction." *

In the hope, that the Cambridge Theological School would be true to these momentous obligations, would answer to the piercing cry of our country and age for a free and generous theology, would be a tower of safety and strength against

* Greenwood's *Theology of the Cambridge Divinity School*, pp. 5–7, 14.

every foe of mental liberty, we have loved it with an exceeding love. Her name has been written on the very palms of our hands; they would sooner forget their cunning, than we could forget her welfare; she had taught us to search boldly, though meekly and reverently, into the mysteries of God and the mind of Christ; we took pleasure in her stones and even honored her dust; we valued her reputation, her influence, her usefulness, as if it had been our own; we looked to her, perhaps with exaggerated, yet with pardonable confidence, as the great hope of a progressive theology in our native land, as the fountain from which a bright and benignant light would radiate beyond the mountains of New England, and shine upon the broad and pleasant meadows of the West. This feeling has been shared in common with almost all our clergymen. We have endeavored to diffuse it in our societies; it has kindled the enthusiasm of our most noble-minded young men; our opulent citizens have not escaped its influence; and nearly the whole of our religious community have regarded the School at Cambridge as their favorite child.

It must be a privilege, under any circumstances, to address an audience composed in this manner. The occasion, it would seem, could not but lift one above the region of vulgar trivialities, awak-

en thoughts of a deep and solemn character, cleanse the mind from every taint of prejudice, and suppress all consciousness of self in devotion to truth and freedom. I do not wonder that the interest of the occasion was deeply and widely felt, that it called together a numerous company of brothers and friends, such as seldom honors the festive assemblages of our University. This interest was still further enhanced by the fact, that in accordance with their character as liberal ministers, they had arrived at different conclusions in regard to several important topics of theology. In our happy state of society, as there is no very broad line of distinction between the clergy and the rest of the community, they had shared in the influences, which, within the last few years, have acted so strongly on the public mind; with intelligent and reflecting men of every pursuit and persuasion, many of them had been led to feel the necessity of a more thorough reform in theology; they were not satisfied that the denial of the Trinity and its kindred doctrines gave them possession of all spiritual truth; they wished to press forward in the course which they had begun, to ascend to higher views, to gain a deeper insight into Christianity, to imbibe more fully its divine spirit, and to apply the truths of revelation to the wants of society and the progress of man.

Their experience as pastors had brought them into contact with a great variety of minds; some of which were dissatisfied with the traditions they had been taught; the religion of the day seemed too cold, too lifeless, too mechanical for many of their flock; they were called to settle difficulties in theology of which they had not been advised in the school; objections were presented by men of discernment and acuteness, which could not be set aside by the learning of books; it was discovered that many had become unable to rest their religious faith on the foundation of a material philosophy; and that a new direction must be given to their ideas, or they would be lost to Christianity, and possibly to virtue. The wants of such minds could not be concealed; they were known to the ministers, if not to the world; to neglect them would have been a sin; the wandering sheep in the wilderness excited more interest than the ninety and nine which were safe in the fold, and to restore them to the good shepherd was counted a paramount duty.

In the course of the inquiries which they had entered into, for their own satisfaction and the good of their people, they had become convinced of the superiority of the testimony of the soul to the evidence of the external senses; the essential character of Christianity, as a principle of spirit-

ual faith, of reliance on the Universal Father, and of the intrinsic equality and brotherhood of man, was made more prominent than the historical circumstances with which it was surrounded, at its introduction into the world; and the signatures of truth and divinity which it bore on its front were deemed stronger proofs of its origin with God, than even the works of might which were wrought by its Author for the benefit of man. They cherished a firm and sincere conviction of the importance of these views, and their adaptation to the peculiar wants and highest interests of the community. They never disguised the results to which they had come; they gave them a due proportion of attention in their public services; they rejoiced in their discussion, even when it was called forth by rude attacks; though sometimes misunderstood, they were not discouraged; they knew the community they lived in, which will not suffer a good man to be put down; and with a calm confidence in truth, they were content to wait for the prevalence of their views. They regarded them as the natural result of liberal inquiry in theology, chastened and purified by the influence of religious sentiment, and guided by the lights of an elevated spiritual philosophy. In the exercise of their ministry, they had been confirmed in the soundness of their ideas; their be-

nign effects were visible among the people of their charge; and these effects were thought to be in harmony with the spirit of Christ, nay, the necessary product of the religion which he announced. They saw their opinions rapidly spreading among the younger members of the profession, while they were regarded with charity, if not with approbation, by those whom they most honored among their seniors. No difference of speculation had estranged them from the hearts of their brethren; no breach had been made in the sympathy which was the pervading principle of their association; the understanding had been sacredly observed, if not formally expressed, that a profession of faith in Christ, and a sincere and virtuous character were the conditions of fellowship, rather than any agreement in theological opinion.

Such were the circumstances in which the Alumni assembled to hear the first annual Discourse before their Association. It was to be expected that the speaker on such an occasion would either confine himself to those topics which were of equal interest to all, on which there was no prominent diversity of opinion; or that if he chose to select a subject of controversy, he would discuss it, not merely with a semblance of calmness and moderation, but with a manly adherence

to the great principles of liberal Christianity, and a scrupulous sense of justice towards the sentiments and character of his brethren.

In this respect, the Discourse, which was pronounced, appears to me not only at variance with the spirit of the occasion, but adapted to mislead the public mind, on subjects which deeply interest it. A temperate, though firm and decided examination of its statements is called for by the claims of truth and justice, the cause of mental freedom, and a regard to the progress of liberal theology and enlightened religion in our community.

I am impelled by these considerations to submit your Discourse to the test of an impartial criticism; and in the discharge of this duty, you will pardon me if I speak with great frankness, if I endeavor to be as faithful in pointing out your errors, as I am sure you would have been towards another in similar circumstances. I shall avoid all harshness of expression; for my object is not triumph, but truth; still I am aware that you cannot read my remarks without pain; and I therefore protest, in the outset, against the severity with which I shall handle your assertions being construed into discourtesy towards yourself. It is unpleasant to speak as I shall be forced to; but it will be remembered, that the subject of

controversy is not merely a speculative opinion, but involves a vindication from the charge of a grave moral offence.

Before proceeding to the discussion of the leading topic of your Discourse, you will allow me to express my disapprobation of the peculiar form, which you were pleased to adopt for the communication of your sentiments. I object to it, not merely as a matter of taste, — though much might be said in that regard, — but as adapted to make a false impression, which it is more difficult to set right, than if your manner of treating the subject had been simple and direct. The point I allude to will appear in a moment.

You commence with the assertion, (p. 4.) that, "our religion is very imperfectly understood: and received by comparatively a small number with intelligent faith." You then announce as the theme of your Discourse (p. 5.) "the characteristics of the times and some of those opinions NOW PREVALENT, which are at war with a belief in Christianity."

This, certainly, was a judicious opening, and I only speak the sentiments of your whole audience, when I say that it was heard with universal pleasure. It at once brought up a subject of the highest importance, of no small

difficulty, and of singular interest to our community at the present moment. It gave the promise that you would discuss the character and tendency of opinions now prevalent in the midst of us; that you would meet some of the objections which have been advanced to popular theological ideas; that you would come directly to the great questions that are at issue between different portions of the audience which you addressed. There was reason to hope that you would oppose certain substantial obstacles to the current of thought which threatens in the view of some individuals to endanger our most valuable institutions; so that they who were inclined to this direction might find their difficulties removed, their ignorance enlightened, their love of vague and visionary speculations corrected, and the truth presented in so clear and attractive a light, that they could not fail to receive it; while those who were attached to the contrary mode of thinking would be furnished with arguments sufficient to repel every alarming encroachment.

But, instead of this mode of proceeding, you adopted one which could not have been expected from your statement of the subject, and which I conceive to have been singularly irrelevant to the demands of your audience, and the nature of the occasion. Instead of meeting face to face the

opinions which have found favor with many theologians in this country, which are publicly maintained from the pulpit and the press in our own immediate community, which form the cardinal points on which speculation is divided among us, you appear studiously to refrain from all mention of them; no one could infer from your remarks, that any novel ideas had been broached in our theological world, excepting those whose origin can be traced back to the skeptical reasonings of Spinoza and Hume, and a comparatively small class of the modern theologians of Germany. You argue with considerable strength against their assumptions; but even if you had succeeded in their complete demolition, no progress would thus have been gained towards your main object; for, I venture to say, not ten copies of Spinoza's Works can be found in our vicinity; I greatly doubt whether there are ten persons among us, who have ever read as many pages of his writings; and as for Hume's "famous Essay on Miracles," no one deems it worth while to disturb its repose in the dust of the library; at least, it is so seldom that we hear its name alluded to, that we may justly regard it as having gone to sleep. The case is the same with the German theologians, to whom you refer in the body of your Discourse. They have no weight with our theological inqui-

rers; their day is fast declining in their own country; and no man acquainted with the progress of opinion in Germany could allude to the peculiar speculations of Paulus, for example, as exerting any perceptible influence on its present condition. The whole course of your reasoning in regard to the objections of Spinoza and Hume had no more connexion with your subject, than a refutation of the astrologers and alchemists of the middle ages. You undertook to speak of prevailing opinions; you were understood to have in view errors that have made their appearance among ourselves; but the doctrine which you oppose of the impossibility of miracles, on which you labor throughout a great part of your Discourse, and the annihilation of which you deem to be of such vital importance, is not known to have an advocate among our theologians. If there be one, I am sure, I never heard of him. The questions at issue in the new movement, as it is called, relate to a different subject. Your reasonings, accordingly, on the topic you chose, were thrown away. They excited no opposition, and therefore, little interest. You failed to argue the points on which there is much solicitude; and confined yourself to one, which nobody conversant with the actual state of inquiry cares any thing about.

But although you devoted yourself to the exami-

nation of past errors, of doctrines, which, however formidable in another age, have no immediate effect on the present condition of thought, the circumstances in which you spoke, and the relations which you sustain to our theological community, could not fail to produce the impression that you had reference to existing opinions, that you were attacking ideas which were not only cherished in past centuries, and in foreign countries, but which were beginning to make progress, to exert a disastrous influence on the interests of sound thought and pure religion, in our own land. It is this ambiguity that I complain of. A want of openness is never favorable to the cause of truth. The effect on those who now read your Discourse, as it was on most of your audience, unless they exercise a more than ordinary discrimination and independence of thought, unless they possess facilities for correct information, which of course were in your power, but which few are able to command, will be precisely the same as if you had charged the opinions you opposed on those who are understood to differ from you, in your general views of theology. On former occasions, you had assumed the attitude of a chastiser of the heresies of your brethren; you had made yourself "the talk of the day" in our social circles by your zealous limitation of the

rights of free inquiry, on account of the dangerous results to which it led; you were selected as the anniversary speaker in order that you might have a fair opportunity to do justice to your own views and practices in this respect, and sustain your position against your opponents; many came from far and near to be present on the occasion, at no small inconvenience to themselves; and not a man among them could doubt for a moment that you would express yourself with freedom, with clearness, with power, on the views of your brethren which were at war with your own.

Such being the case, it appears to me, that peculiar caution and delicacy were requisite, in order to avoid even the possibility of misapprehension. A sincere love of truth always leads us to be as circumspect in stating the opinions of an adversary, as our own; and to exercise a scrupulous care, that he be not placed in a false position, made responsible for errors which he disclaims, and confounded with men with whom he has no affinity. I should expect this rule to be violated by an excited controversialist in his passion for victory; but from a candid and ingenuous spirit, I should look for its most fastidious observance. The practical effect of this ambiguity, in other respects, is somewhat singular. It places your readers at liberty to apply your

remarks to the views of those whom you are accustomed to denounce; they would be perfectly justified in doing so, for aught that appears in your Discourse; and to suppose that they do not would be affectation or folly. At the same time, a person not familiar with the present relations of our theological community, a stranger who did not perceive that more was signified than said, might feel surprised that any body should take the trouble to reply to your assertions. You have given yourself the advantage, such as it is, of making an indirect attack through the medium of obsolete opinions; and if those to whom it is applied, think it necessary to vindicate themselves, you can maintain that you had no such reference in view, and that the supposition, on their part, that you had is entirely gratuitous.

But the advantage you thus gain is momentary. It soon presents another aspect. I hardly need to state the dilemma to which you are reduced. If you meant to say that the opinions of Spinoza and Hume on the doctrine of miracles were adopted by that portion of your audience which differed from yourself, your Discourse was unjust; if you did not mean to say this, it was nugatory. And in either case, you were bound to express yourself so that one should not be left in the dark as to what you did mean. Or, if you took it for

granted, that those opinions were held by your opponents, you advanced an invidious charge, while you were ignorant of the facts. If you persist in saying that they are held, I call for the proof.

I do not intend, however, to dwell on these points. They relate to personal ethics, rather to questions in theology; the cause of truth, in general, is not essentially affected, by the mode which an individual adopts for the expression of his views; and I accordingly hasten to the discussion of the chief topic which I conceive worthy of attention in the statements of your Discourse. I refer to your adoption and defence of the exclusive principle in an Address before an assembly of liberal clergymen. By the exclusive principle, I mean the assumption of the right for an individual, or for any body of individuals, to make their own private opinions the measure of what is fundamental in the Christian faith. As liberal Christians, we have long contended against this principle, as contrary to the very essence of Protestantism; we have claimed the inherent right of private judgment, as essential to Christian freedom; we have resisted, to the uttermost, every attempt to impose controverted points of opinion on the universal belief of the Church. We have welcomed every man as a brother, who acknowl-

edged Christ as his Master; we have not presumed to sit in judgment on any Christian's claim to discipleship; we have refused to entertain the question, whether he were entitled to the Christian name; we have felt that it was not ours to give or to withhold; and that the decision in all cases, must rest with himself. It was not because our exclusive brethren made a belief in the Trinity, a test of allegiance to Christ, that we accused them of inconsistency with the liberty of the Gospel; but because they presumed to erect any standard whatever, according to which the faith of individuals should be made to conform to the judgment of others. It was not any special application of the principle, that we objected to; it was the principle itself; and assuredly, the exercise of this principle does not change its character, by reason of the source from which it proceeds. Nay, is it not aggravated by the fact, that it is sustained, not by those with whom it forms a part of their religion, but by those whose religion is identified with hostility to it?

But the doctrine which lies at the foundation of your whole Discourse is a signal manifestation of the exclusive principle. You propose your own convictions, — and convictions, which it will appear in the sequel of this letter, are directly at war with the prevailing faith of the Church, —

as the criterion of genuine Christian belief. You maintain that the truth of Christianity can be supported by no other evidence than that which appears satisfactory to yourself; that unless we are persuaded of the divine origin of our religion by the arguments which you deem valid, we cannot be persuaded at all; and that to speak of faith in the revelations of the Gospel, unless that faith be built on the only basis which you pronounce to be good, is, in itself, a proof of delusion or insincerity. You make no allowance for the immeasurable variety of mind which is found everywhere, for the different direction which early education, natural temperament, and peculiar associations impart to men's habits of thinking, for the shifting lights which the same evidence presents, according to the circumstances in which it arrests the attention, or for the changes acquired by language and the ideas which it conveys, in the progress of ages; but you advance your principle, with the same want of reserve or qualification that a teacher of the Infallible Church would have exhibited before the Reformation; you declare that a certain kind of evidence, in your view, establishes the truth of Christianity, and that he who rests his faith on any other is an infidel, notwithstanding his earnest and open professions to the contrary. You thus, in fact, denied the name of Christian to

not a few individuals in your audience, although you avoid discussing the grounds by which their opinions are supported. For it is perfectly well known that many of our most eminent clergymen, — I will not refrain from speaking of them as they deserve, on account of my personal sympathy with their views, — repose their belief in the divine origin of Christianity on a different foundation from that which you approve as the only tenable one. Men whose names are almost a passport to the opinions they adopt, whose lives are a guaranty against all suspicion of guile, whose fervent devotion to every cause that promises the extension of religion or the good of man has become proverbial, whose candor and transparency of character is a constant memorial of the simplicity of Christ, are inclined to rest their convictions of the divinity of the Gospel on evidence which commends itself to their minds, although you may pronounce it to be valueless and deceptive. Among those who adopt this view of Christianity are clergymen who have never enjoyed the benefit of your instructions, but whose minds have been kept open to every fresh access of light, as well as their younger brethren who are deeply indebted to your counsels and example in the pursuit of truth, and who have obtained from your influence in former years, something of that

spirit of freedom, for which they are now condemned.

But according to the doctrine of your Discourse, their faith in Christianity is either a self-deception or a pretence; the divine glory which they recognise in Christ is a vain chimera; they are disqualified for the office of Christian teachers; their very profession of Christianity is a blot on their characters; it calls in question either their intellect or their conscience, or both; they are exhorted to abandon a calling which they have no right to pursue; and since they do not receive your construction of the evidences of Christianity, to declare to the world that they repudiate the Savior, and regard the glorious Gospel of the blessed God as the invention of man.

This application of the exclusive principle is the more remarkable, when we consider the vehemence with which you have opposed it, in reference to your own opinions. Within a few years, you have appeared as the public advocate of mental freedom; you have spurned, with sovereign displeasure, every restraint upon your independence; you have claimed and exercised the right of every man to form his own opinions on the doctrines of Christianity, without incurring the reproach of skepticism or insincerity; and no one has exhibited a more indignant eloquence than

yourself at the introduction of personalities into religious discussions, at the substitution of denunciation for argument, and at an appeal to the prejudices and timidity of men, rather than to their good sense and love of truth. So long as your own right to free investigation was called in question, you displayed a singular zeal in its defence; you rejected with just scorn, the charge of infidelity, because you cherished conceptions of Christianity at war with the faith of the great majority of Christians; and you could hardly, if at all, admit the idea that any but a narrow and vulgar mind was capable of bringing such a charge. But you now present the same accusation against a portion of your fellow Christians, for rejecting opinions which you adopt. Instead of answering their arguments, you attack their characters. You attempt to silence them not by persuasion, but by reproach. You refuse to meet them on equal grounds; you would first make them infidels in the eyes of the public; and then, if ever, examine their ideas.

The first avowed advocacy and exercise of the exclusive principle among liberal Christians, as far as I know, has been by yourself. Hitherto it has been confined to Christians of a different faith. They have had reasons for their proceeding which do not exist in your case. They con-

demned those who claimed the Christian name, for the rejection of doctrines that had the sanction of the Church; you condemn them, for not receiving opinions which are almost peculiar to yourself. They urged the necessity of doctrines which the testimony of religious consciousness had pronounced to be true; you denounce the opinion that divine truth can be perceived by the intuitions of consciousness. They insisted on the belief of doctrines which they held essential to the salvation of the soul; you insist on hypotheses which you confess have only a strong probability in their favor. They contended for doctrines which were supposed to form the very substance of Christianity; you contend for a method of establishing its evidence.*

* I cannot but refer the candid reader to some more complete discussions of the exclusive system than I am able to give in this place. The times demand a recurrence to first principles, if we would not forget the essential grounds of our existence as a distinct Christian denomination. If any one will read the "Discourse on the Exclusive System," by Dr. Walker, and the "Essay on the System of Exclusion and Denunciation," by Dr. Channing, not to mention other productions of the last named writer, he will perceive, I think, that their reasonings against exclusiveness are no less applicable to the present case, than to those which they had immediately in view. It cannot be repeated too often, that it is the intrinsic character of the exclusive principle, which we condemn, not its special application. Dr. Walker very pertinently remarks, (Discourse, p. 4. 1st Ed.) "Men have always been willing that every one should think as he pleases,

I have thus far confined my remarks to your adoption of the exclusive principle, without a direct consideration of the doctrine, in support of which you have given that principle the sanction of your authority. It would be a glaring inconsistency with all our modes of thought, with all our practical usages, as liberal Christians, for an individual to make any speculative opinion the standard of Christian faith, however true and important the opinion might be in itself. But the inconsistency is aggravated, when the doctrine which is maintained on exclusive grounds can easily be shown to be almost peculiar to the individual by whom it is announced, at variance with the general belief of Christians in every age, incapable of support from the teachings of Scripture and right reason, and involving consequences of an irreligious and alarming character.

so long as he will please to think as they do; and this, especially when the clergy have been called in to decide the question, has commonly been the extent of their notions of religious liberty. Every sect has preached up just enough of liberality to answer its own purpose, that is to say, just enough to secure an indulgence to its own deviations from the traditionary faith. But further than this, almost every one has agreed, that liberality must be a very dangerous thing. All have allowed a certain latitude of thinking, within which liberty may be enjoyed; but if any one should go beyond this, though in the exercise of the same liberty, he is to be regarded and treated as an apostate from the religion."

I sincerely regret that I am obliged by fidelity to my subject to show that this is the case with the leading doctrine of your Discourse. The leading doctrine, I say, for although you merely declare it, without advancing any considerations in its favor, without noticing the objections which press it on all sides, the manner in which you apply it to the defence of your views, evinces that it occupied the most prominent place in your mind, and that you intended it should form the strongest impression produced by your Discourse.

The doctrine to which I allude, and which I now mean to discuss, is that THE MIRACLES RECORDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT ARE THE ONLY PROOF OF THE DIVINE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY.

You assert, (p. 5.) "that the divine authority of him whom God commissioned to speak to us in his name was attested, in the *only* mode in which it could be, by miraculous displays of his power." Christianity offers, (p. 18.) "in attestation of the truths of the facts, which it reveals, the *only* satisfactory proof, the authority of God, evidenced by miraculous display of his power." (p. 22.) "*No proof* of the divine commission of Christ could be afforded but through miraculous displays of God's power." But I need not multiply quotations to show your advocacy of a doctrine, for which,

I presume, you will not disclaim being responsible.

The question at issue, therefore, ought to be distinctly understood. It is not concerning the divine mission of Jesus Christ. The certainty of that will be at the foundation of my reasonings; and it is admitted, as far as I know, in all the controversies to which the subject has given rise in our own country.

Nor is it, whether Jesus Christ performed the miracles ascribed to him in the New Testament. I shall hereafter allude to the doubts which are felt by many excellent Christians on this point; but for my own part, I cannot avoid the conclusion, that the miracles related in the Gospels were actually wrought by Jesus. Without being blind to the difficulties of the subject, I receive this view, according to my best knowledge and understanding, on the evidence presented; and in this belief I am joined by a large number of those, against whom your charge of infidelity is alleged among ourselves.

Neither does the question, I am about to consider, relate to any philosophical explanation of the miracles of Christ. I believe that he gave health to the sick, sight to the blind, and life to the dead; and my explanation of these facts is that presented in the New Testament. "No man

could do the miracles which he did, except God were with him."* "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power; who went about doing good; for God was with him."† If you have any different, or any better explanation to offer of these facts, it would furnish an interesting object of examination, but can form no part of the present discussion.

Nor, finally, does the question relate to the validity of miracles as the credentials of a divine messenger. That question, it is true, forms an important topic of theological science; much vague and superficial thought is exercised concerning it; it is often presented in a manner, adapted to awaken the most lively doubts; and it demands a wise and thorough revision, before, in the present state of opinion, it can receive an answer that will satisfy the earnest and reflecting Christian inquirer. But this is, by no means, the question at issue on the present occasion.

The point now to be considered is simply this, Are miracles the only evidence of the divine origin of Christianity?

Before proceeding to the arguments which prove that this position cannot be sustained, I

* John iii. 2. † Acts x. 38.

must notice a palpable error, into which you have been led by assuming the truth of the principle in question, without examining its foundation. This error pervades the whole of your reasoning, and must destroy its weight with every logical thinker. You confound two propositions which are essentially distinct; and you appear to have no suspicion that a distinction was necessary. This want of discrimination is the cause of a certain obscurity and vagueness in your statements, which make one doubtful at times, whether he has rightly apprehended their meaning. But it is sufficiently clear, that you make no distinction in your own mind, and express none in your Discourse, between a belief in a divine revelation, and in the miracles alleged in its support. You utterly confound the divine origin of Christianity, and a certain class of the proofs of its divine origin.

Now the truth of the divine origin of Christianity is expressed by one proposition; the reality of the miracles of Jesus, by another; these propositions are clearly distinguished in all accurate thought; they are no less clearly distinguished in the history of opinions; and it by no means follows, that because a man receives or denies the one, he receives or denies the other also.

There are many Christians who have been convinced of the divine origin of Christianity not by

miracles, but by other evidence; they acknowledge Jesus of Nazareth as the Savior of the world; they believe that the Divine Word which was in the beginning with God was made flesh in the Son of Mary, because they have seen his glory, full of grace and truth; they bow to his authority as to the authority of God; they rejoice in the revelations which he was inspired to make; but in the progress of inquiry, they have become sensible to the difficulties which encumber the theory of miracles; they know the doubts which have been cast on their historical evidence; they are told by the most acute and learned critics, — and you, Sir, are among the number,* — that some of the mira-

* In allusion to the account of the nativity of Christ given by Luke, it is said by Mr. Norton, that "the cast of the narrative has something of a poetical, and even fabulous character." Norton's *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels*, Additional Notes, p. liv.

"Fictions began early to be propagated, concerning the nativity and childhood of Jesus. To these fictions the narrative [in the first two chapters of the Gospel of Matthew] appears to belong from its intrinsic character. In the story of the Magi, we find represented a strange mixture of astrology and miracle." *Ibid.* p. lix.

"The narrative of Luke is, as I have said, in a style rather poetical than historical. With its real miracles, the fictions of oral tradition had probably become blended; and the individual by whom it was committed to writing probably added what he regarded as poetical embellishments. With our present means of judging, however, we cannot draw a precise line between the truth, and what has been added to the truth." *Ibid.* pp. lxi. lxii.

cles related in the Bible, bear the marks of falsehood on their face, that the most probable account to be given of them is that they are legendary inventions; and can any one be surprised, that though believing in Christ, and in his divine mission, they cannot say that they believe in the reality of the miracles; at least, they are in doubt;

The miracle of the appearing of the saints after the resurrection of Christ is spoken of as follows. "Who, it may be asked, were these saints? How long had they lain in their sepulchres? — After Christ's resurrection, it is said, they left their sepulchres and went into the holy city. In this extraordinary statement we may recognise, I think, the fabrication of some relater of the story. If these views are correct, the story must be regarded as a fable." *Ibid.* pp. lxviii. lxix.

The passage, (Luke xxii. 43, 44.) which describes the "agony and bloody sweat" of the Redeemer, is thus commented on. "The objections which present themselves to the passage, considered in its intrinsic character, are the following. The agony of Christ is represented as existing after the angel had been sent to strengthen him. The bloody sweat described, is such as we have no authority for believing was ever produced by mere distress of mind, if it have been by any other cause. The account appears at variance with the character of Christ, and especially with that calmness, self-possession, and firmness, which he manifested during the evening and night previous to his apprehension." *Ibid.* p. lxxxi.

Now to a large majority of Christians, this language will appear like gross infidelity. It does not alter the case to say, that it was not intended as such. Does not the author see that this bandying of ungrateful epithets tends directly to silence all calm and impartial discussion of scientific theology? I leave it to a candid Christian community to judge whether such a writer is authorized to accuse his brethren of infidelity.

and they wish to suspend their judgment until further examination.

Such a state of mind, I well know, is not uncommon. There are few persons, who are called by their inclination or their profession to intimate religious communings with their fellow-men, that have not met with frequent instances of it. I cannot but express my surprise that you should not have known any individuals of this character, in the course of your experience; or, if you have known such, that you should feel warranted to condemn them as you do. I own that I see no grounds on which their rigid and peremptory exclusion from the the name of Christians can be justified. In certain cases, this state of mind becomes permanent; in others, it only forms one stage in the religious experience; the strong conviction of the divinity of Christ himself, leads to an equally strong conviction of the divinity of his works.

I can hardly suppose that the description I have here presented will not be perfectly intelligible to yourself as well as to every reflecting reader; but that I may not be misunderstood by those who find it difficult to seize a point of view with which they are not familiar, it may be well to illustrate my statement by a reference to the form in which many, at the present day, believe in the

divine legation of Moses. Indeed I am not sure that in regard to the religion of the Old Testament, you would not adopt these conceptions yourself. The believers I allude to, are persuaded that God spoke by Moses; a special divine interposition seems necessary to them in order to account for the origin of Judaism; but yet they find reason to doubt the literal truth of the Mosaic miracles. These miracles, in their view, extend too far into a dark and uncertain period of antiquity to impart a strong confidence, as the foundation of faith; if their reception was essential to a belief in the inspiration of Moses, this fact would fail of reception also; but from other considerations, while they are not satisfied as to the reality of the Old Testament miracles, they are persuaded of the divine origin of the Old Testament religion.

In applying this case to the one already mentioned, the parallel should not be pushed too far. I do not mean to compare the inspiration and miracles of Moses with the inspiration and miracles of Christ, in respect to the divine power which they displayed, or the evidence by which they are supported; but I maintain that precisely as certain individuals believe in the divine legation of Moses, before they are satisfied in regard to his miracles, so certain individuals may believe

in the divine mission of Christ, before they are satisfied concerning his miracles.

Let us bear this distinction in mind, while we examine one or two passages in the Discourse, which relate to this point. It will thus be evident that you lost sight of a fundamental difference; and that, accordingly, as your subsequent reasonings are founded on error, they can have nothing but error as the consequence.

"By a belief in Christianity, we mean the belief that Christianity is a revelation by God of the truths of religion; and that the divine authority of him whom God commissioned to speak to us in his name was attested, in the only mode in which it could be, by miraculous displays of his power." (p. 5.) A part of this passage has already been quoted in another connexion; I refer to it now, for the purpose of pointing out the confusion of thought, of which I have spoken.

"Christianity is a revelation by God of the truths of religion." This is a distinct, independent proposition. I may admit it, without being obliged to admit any other, which it does not logically include; but that this revelation "is attested by miraculous displays of God's power" is a quite different proposition; there is no necessary connexion between them; and any argument, which you attempt to build on the supposition of such a

connexion, falls to the ground. The question in the first case is, Whether I believe, that Christianity is a revelation by God of the truths of religion; how that revelation is attested is another question; and because I do not accept your answer to the last, you have no right to conclude that I give a negative answer to the first.

You are thus brought to the following alternative. If you say, that the first part of your definition of a belief in Christianity is incomplete, and requires the second part for its complement; you maintain that one can believe "that Christianity is a revelation by God of the truths of religion," and yet be destitute of the essential Christian faith; or in other words, he can believe in the divine revelation of Christianity, and be an unbeliever at the same time. If you say that the first part of your definition is sufficient of itself, you abandon your ground, and confess that you have brought the charge of infidelity, without cause. If you say, finally, that the first part of your definition necessarily involves the second, you beg the question in dispute; and I need not tell you, what would be the value of reasoning that starts with a fallacy.

Again, you observe, (p. 21.) that "if it were not for the abuse of language that has prevailed, it would be idle to say, that in denying the mira-

cles of Christianity, the truth of Christianity is denied." We here find the same unhappy confusion. You do not perceive that a belief in the Christian revelation is one thing, and a belief in the miracles which are claimed in its support is another. Whether the assertion you allude to were idle or not, would depend on two circumstances. First, whether any believer professed to receive Christianity as a divine revelation, while he doubted the miracles; the miracles being not the revelation itself, but an element in its proof; and secondly, whether you called in question the reality of his belief in the revelation, on account of his doubt of the miracles. If these circumstances existed, the assertion would not be idle. But it would contain a grave accusation, and one somewhat difficult of proof; one, indeed, to which it is not easy to attach any definite meaning; namely, that a man who believed the divine origin of Christianity, denied the truth of Christianity.

You continue the same train of thought as follows. "It is in vain to attempt to strike out what relates directly or indirectly to the miraculous authority and works of Christ, with the expectation that any thing consistent or coherent will remain. It is as if one were to undertake to cut out from a precious agate, the figure which nature

has inwrought, and to pretend, that by the removal of this accidental blemish, the stone might be left in its original form." (p. 23.) This is a beautiful illustration; but an illustration is not an argument; and it sometimes dazzles the eye, so that it cannot perceive the truth. It is so in this case. You confound the "divine authority" of Christ with his "miraculous works." You thus lose the force of your comparison. It would have been more pertinent, if you had said, that as he who removes the frame in which a precious stone is set does not destroy the gem, so he who doubts the miraculous accounts which form the outside of Christianity, does not necessarily deny the divine origin of the religion itself.

The distinction which is now insisted on cannot be set aside by the assertion that the divine mission of Christ is itself a miracle. For in that case, you change the question at issue, which relates not to the divine mission of Christ, but to the evidence by which it is supported. If you say, that a belief in the divine mission of Christ is all the belief in miracles you contend for, you acknowledge that you have brought a groundless charge against your opponents; for the divine mission of Christ they have never denied. But if you say, that the divine mission of Christ cannot be separated from the miracles, usually al-

leged as proof, you confound two points, which, as we have seen, are essentially distinct; this confusion can be justified only by the principle that "miracles are the sole proof of a divine revelation;" but in assuming this principle, you assume what is not yet settled; and what, I shall show, if I do not deceive myself, has no evidence in its favor.

It has been my purpose, in the preceding remarks, to point out the looseness of reasoning, with which you attempt to support the exclusive doctrine of your Discourse. I have shown, as I trust, that a denial of the divine origin of Christianity, and a denial of the miracles related in the New Testament, are two different things; that there is no real or necessary connexion between them; but it will be perceived by every accurate thinker, that this statement does not affect the question concerning the reality of the miracles. It does not deny them; it does not bring them under suspicion; it leaves them just where they were before; great problems in the experience of man to be resolved by the united aids of history and philosophy. I have already stated, that the evidence by which they are supported, on the whole, appears satisfactory to my mind, though I have no disposition to force my conviction on the minds of others.

I proceed now to an examination of the doctrine of your Discourse, that the evidence of miracles is the only proof of a divine revelation.

I. The intelligent reader will at once be struck with the boldness, the extravagance, and the novelty of this doctrine. If he has paid the slightest attention to theological inquiries, and is acquainted with the manner in which the evidences of Christianity have usually been presented, he will wonder at the radical innovation which you attempt to introduce into a familiar and important topic of theological science. Heretofore, it has been counted a signal excellence of Christianity, that it was capable of proof, by a great variety of evidence. In this respect, its adaptation to be a universal religion has been earnestly set forth; its ablest defenders have supported it on the ground that it appealed to a multiplicity of proofs; and its claims to the character of a revelation from God have been maintained by manifold considerations, according to the tendency of the minds, to which it was addressed.

Thus, while the argument from miracles has formed a prominent topic of discussion, other arguments have been derived from prophecy and its fulfilment, from the character of Christ, from the excellence of his doctrine, from the wisdom and comprehensiveness of his plan, from the rapid

propagation of Christianity in the most unpropitious circumstances, from the tendency of the Gospel to satisfy the wants of the soul, from the actual effects it has produced on the civilization and happiness of the world, and from its harmony with the suggestions of the higher nature of man.

Each of these arguments, — and I have not attempted to enumerate all that have been alleged, — has been regarded as powerful in itself; some of them alone sufficient to produce a rational faith; certainly a conviction that Christianity is more probably true than false, which, according to your Discourse, is all that can be sustained on the highest grounds of evidence; and, taken together, they have been supposed to form a moral demonstration, impregnable against the assaults of infidelity. The process of reasoning has been, to advance directly from these proofs to the divine origin of Christianity, to make the same inference from them as to the mission of Christ, which you derive from the miracles.

We find, accordingly, that different writers have discussed different branches of the Christian evidences; one is distinguished for his masterly exposition of the argument from prophecy; another, for his admirable illustration of the internal characteristics of Christianity; another, for his

accurate historical investigation of its effects on the social condition of man; a fourth establishes the coincidence between the truths of revelation and the testimony of reason; while another argues from the miracles of Christ to the divinity of his mission, though he does not maintain with yourself that they are the only satisfactory proof. In like manner, it is found that the effects of these arguments vary with the natural disposition and mental habits of the individuals to whom they are presented. Some are powerfully affected by one portion of the Christian evidence; others, by that of a different character; miracles are conclusive to one, prophecy to another, and the intrinsic nature of Christianity, to a third; what appears little short of mathematical demonstration to me, is lightly esteemed by my neighbor; while that which produces conviction in his mind, fails of any perceptible influence on mine.

Now, if I rightly apprehend your doctrine, you maintain that as miracles are the only adequate proofs of a divine revelation, all the other branches of evidence which have usually been relied on, are destitute of independent force; they are good to confirm the probability of miracles; but for nothing else. You observe (p. 21.) that, "it has been vaguely alleged, that the *internal evidences* of our religion are sufficient; but this can be said by

no one who understands what Christianity is, and what its internal evidences are." "The internal evidence of Christianity," according to your Discourse, (p. 25.) consists in this circumstance, namely, that "the history of Jesus being full of accounts of his miracles, every thing in his history, what relates to himself and what relates to others, is conformed to this fact, and to the conception of him as speaking with authority from God." The internal evidence, therefore, is no proof in itself of the divine authority of Christ; it is reduced to a mere negative element; nothing but a condition for the validity of the external evidence; the Gospel is deprived of all inherent marks of truth and divinity. You thus deny the strength of the arguments, by which the faith of a multitude of Christians is sustained; but in so doing, you advance a principle, which I will not call "the latest form of infidelity," but which is certainly at war with the prevailing faith of Christians in every age of the Church.

I do not indeed assert that this doctrine of the exclusive validity of miraculous evidence is original with yourself. It may have been advanced by theological innovators in former ages; but it has never gained credit with any considerable portion of the church; and, until it was broached by an eminent Scottish divine of our own day, —

a writer, in allusion to whose work on the "Evidences of Christianity," you have pronounced to be "thoroughly ignorant of the subject," * — it could hardly be said to have received a public advocacy as a principle of theology. The honor of bringing it forward is shared between yourself and Dr. Thomas Chalmers. Differing as you do from him on other points, on this, you take possession of his ground. The identity of doctrine produces even a similarity of expression. Dr. Chalmers declares, that independent of revelation, "of the invisible God, we have no experience whatever." † You remark, that the mere fact of revelation "introduces God within the sphere of human experience." ‡ Dr. Chalmers observes, that "in the miracles of Christ, the existence of God is laid before us by an evidence altogether distinct from the natural argument of the schools." § You maintain, that "the miraculous communication from God to men makes his existence a reality to our minds." || Dr. Chalmers insists that the only internal evidence which is entitled to credit, is that taken from "the marks of

* Norton's *Statement of Reasons*, p. 98.

† Chalmers' *Works*, p. 10.

‡ *Discourse*, Note ii. p. 64.

§ Chalmers, *Ibid.* p. 58.

|| *Discourse*, Note ii. p. 64.

truth and honesty in the performance itself," "the consistency of the particulars with what we already know from other sources of information." * You contend that the only internal evidence which is entitled to credit, is that taken from "the consistency in the representations given by the different evangelists of the actions and words of Christ, as a messenger from God to men," † and from other similar considerations. Dr. Chalmers "disclaims all support, from what is commonly understood by the internal evidence, consisting of those proofs that Christianity is a dispensation from heaven, which are founded upon the nature of its doctrines and the character of the dispensation itself." ‡ You assert that no one who "understood" the subject would rely upon this evidence.§ Dr. Chalmers, however, tells us, that in this course of reasoning, he deviates from "the general example of those who have written on the Deistical controversy," ‖ and he assigns some plausible arguments in favor of this deviation. You do not intimate that your procedure is novel; nor do you present any reasons in its defence. I ought to add, in justice to Dr. Chalmers, that, at a subsequent period, he retracted his position.

* Chalmers' *Works*, p. 48. † *Discourse*, p. 26.
‡ *Works*, p. 48. § *Discourse*, p. 21. ‖ *Works*, p. 48.

The fallacy and dangerous effects of his doctrine were ably pointed out; * and in the preface to a new edition of his Work, he modifies his statements, as follows, — thus virtually abandoning the whole ground. "The Author is far from asserting the study of the historical evidence to be the only channel to a faith in the truth of Christianity. How could he, in the face of the obvious fact, that there are thousands and thousands of Christians, who bear the most undeniable marks of the truth having come home to their understanding 'in demonstration of the Spirit and of power'? They have an evidence within themselves, which the world knoweth not, even the promised manifestations of the Savior. This evidence is a 'sign to them that believe.'" †

I will now adduce a part of the historical testimony, which shows that the doctrine of the exclusive validity of miraculous evidence receives no support from the general faith of the Church.

* See a judicious criticism of Dr. Chalmers' argument, in a valuable treatise, entitled "Principles of Christian Evidence illustrated, by an Examination of Arguments subversive of Natural Theology and the Internal Evidence of Christianity, advanced by Dr. T. Chalmers." By Duncan Mears, Professor of Theology in King's College, Aberdeen. It is said that this little volume was the means of convincing Dr. Chalmers of the error of his doctrine.

† *Works*, Preface to Evidences of Christianity.

The early Christian apologists, in their defence of the Gospel, did not confine themselves to any single branch of the evidences. So far from regarding miracles as the only proof, they laid comparatively small stress on their importance. The argument from miracles was slighted, while great use was made of that from prophecy.* Whoever regarded Jesus as the Son of God was acknowledged as a disciple, without reference to the foundation on which his faith was built. I will not weary you with a detail of evidence, in illustration of this fact. The following passage from one of our most learned scholars, whose acquaintance with Christian antiquity entitles his statements to great weight, contains the substance of the matter in a small compass. Speaking of Justin Martyr, he observes, "of the evidence from miracles he scarcely takes any notice. Perhaps the cause may be traced to the popular belief of the age. The efficacy of incantations and magic forms part of this belief, common alike to Christians and Pagans. Miracles were regarded as of no rare occurrence, and they were supposed to be wrought by magical arts. Christianity might then have the support of miracles, but this support would be regarded as of trifling

* See Tzschirner's *Geschichte der Apologetik*, pp. 148 – 152.

importance by those who were believers in the reality of charms and sorcery. The miracle might be admitted, but the evidence derived from it could be invalidated by ascribing it to the effects of magic. That the early Fathers and Apologists really felt a difficulty of this kind, there can be no doubt. The Jews had set the example by attributing the miracles of our Savior to a demoniacal agency. That the heathen trod in their steps by ascribing them to magical influences, we gather from a hint, Justin himself has incidentally dropped, and Origen expressly affirms it as regards Celsus. Here then was a *grand objection to the evidence from miracles*, and one which the Fathers, who were themselves firm believers in the powers of magic and demoniacal influences, must have found it exceedingly difficult to remove." * It does not meet the point, to say that this objection was founded on a popular superstition of the primitive ages; it is sufficient that the objection was felt; for, therefore, some other evidence was deemed important; and, therefore, in fine, the early apologists did not hold to the modern doctrine, that miracles are the only proof of a divine revelation.

* *Christian Examiner*, vol. vii. p. 156. Art. on Justin Martyr, by Alvan Lamson.

The same view concerning the value of miracles was held by the original founders of the Protestant Church. They express themselves in language, which reminds us of the most spiritual writers of a later age, in defence of the testimony addressed to the soul, compared with that addressed to the senses. The miracles of Christianity, in their opinion, were, by no means, the only foundation of belief in Christ. On the contrary, there were other evidences of a more impressive and convincing character. They relied much on the proof taken from Christian experience. The religion, it was argued, which had regenerated the soul, must be from God. I will quote but one or two passages from the great Reformer himself, which are in direct opposition to the doctrine of your Discourse.

"People cry it up as a great miracle, that Christ made the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lepers clean; and, it is true, such works are miraculous signs; but Christ regards his influence on the soul as far more important than that on the body; for as the soul excels the body, so do the miracles wrought on the former excel those wrought on the latter. He distinguishes, therefore, two kinds of miraculous works; and it still continues to be the fact, and it will continue till the last day, that Christ daily and always performs

miraculous works. The former, we admit, he rarely performs; so he did when on earth; for he did not give sight to many blind, he did not heal all the sick; he left many blind and not healed. And what if he had given sight or hearing to a whole heap of people, nay, had raised them from the dead? For such signs were merely for the purpose of founding the Christian Church. Hence, such outward signs and miracles are neither eternal nor common. But the moral signs which Christ regards as miracles, never cease." *

"The miracles, which Christ wrought on the body, are small and almost childish, compared with the high and true miracles, which he constantly performs in the Christian world by his divine, almighty power. For instance, that Christianity is preserved on the earth; that the word of God and faith in him can yet hold out; yea, that a Christian can survive on earth against the devil and all his angels; also against so many tyrants and factions; yea, against our own flesh and blood. The fact that the Gospel remains and improves the human heart, — this is indeed to cast out the devil, and tread on serpents, and speak with tongues, for those visible miracles were merely signs for the ignorant, unbelieving crowd,

* Luther's *Werke*, (Walch's Ed.) vol. xii. p. 1542.

and for those who were yet to be brought in; but for us, who know and believe, what need is there of them? For the heathen, indeed, Christ must needs give external signs, which they could see and take hold of; but Christians must needs have far higher signs, compared with which the former are earthly. It was necessary to bring over the ignorant with external miracles, and to throw out such apples and pears to them as to children; but we, on the contrary, should boast of the great miracles, which Christ daily performs in his church." *

I come now to a more recent period. Time would fail me, if I were to attempt to quote a thousandth part of what has been written in opposition to your principle. I might indeed transcribe nearly the whole of modern English Theology, with the exception of a few writers, who were led by the philosophy of Locke to attach an extravagant value to external evidence. It everywhere recognises the fact, that miracles are not the only proof of Christianity, and strongly insists on other arguments which furnish a valid defence of its divine origin. I will begin with Dr. Barrow, a man whose familiarity with mathematical demon-

* Luther's *Werke*, (Walch's Ed.) vol. xi. p. 1338.

stration did not blunt his mind to the finer distinctions of moral evidence, and who certainly is not usually addicted to what is either novel, or visionary, or heretical.

In the introduction to his admirable Discourse on "The Excellency of the Christian Religion," he remarks, "it is my intent to endeavor now some declaration and proof, by representing briefly some peculiar excellencies and perfections of our religion; which may serve to evince the truth, and evidence the wisdom thereof; to make good that our religion well deserveth the privilege it doth claim of a divine extraction, that it is not an invention of man, but as Paul calleth it, the wisdom of God, proceeding from no other but the God of truth and wisdom. It is indeed a common subject and so the best ever should be; it is always profitable and now seasonable to inculcate it, for the confirmation of ourselves and the conviction of others, in this age of wavering and warping towards infidelity." *

But according to your doctrine, nothing could be more injudicious than this course; for it would divert the attention from the only satisfactory evidence of the truth of Christianity; and instead of putting a stop to infidelity, would favor its progress.

* Barrow's *Sermons*, vol. iv. p. 350.

A similar testimony is given by one of the ablest defenders of Christianity, that the English Church can boast of, Dr. Samuel Clarke. "The practical duties, which the Christian religion enjoins, are all such, as are most agreeable to our natural notions of God, and most perfective of the nature and conducive to the happiness and well-being of men; that is, Christianity, even in this single respect, as containing alone and in one consistent system all the wise and good precepts that ever were taught singly and scatteredly, and many times but very corruptly by the several schools of the philosophers, ought to be embraced and practised by all rational and considering Deists, as highly probable, even though it had NO EXTERNAL EVIDENCE, to be of divine original."* "Let any impartial person judge, whether a religion that tends manifestly to the recovery of the rational part of God's creation, to restore men to the imitation and likeness of God, and to the dignity and highest improvement of their nature, has not WITHIN ITSELF an intrinsic and very powerful evidence of its being TRULY DIVINE. Let any man of an honest and sincere mind consider whether its practical doctrine has not even in itself the *greatest marks of a divine original.* On this

* CLARKE'S *Truth and Certainty of the Christian Revelation*, p. 213.

consideration alone, all sincere inquirers must needs be strongly inclined to embrace the Christian religion; to believe that it is truly divine; and to entertain it with all cheerfulness, as what in itself has those manifold marks of goodness and perfection, which are themselves *sufficient to satisfy* a good man, that it cannot be any thing else than a *revelation from God*, even though it had wanted all OUTWARD PROOFS, AND DIVINE AND MIRACULOUS TESTIMONIES." *

There is no end to citations like these, and I will content myself with referring to one more foreign writer, who is no less attractive on account of the clearness and simplicity of his style, than the sobriety and justness of his reasonings. I mean Dr. Alexander Gerard, Professor of Divinity at Aberdeen. "The external evidences of Christianity," says Dr. Gerard, "are miracles and prophecy; these are the directest proofs of its divinity. Its internal evidence, however, has likewise considerable force; much greater force, it might easily be shown, than some Christian writers have allowed it. This evidence arises from its excellence. — Our Savior and his Apostles were led by the objections of unbelievers to assert, not only that the Gospel is excellent, but

* CLARKE'S *Truth and Certainty, &c.* pp. 216, 217.

also that its excellence is a real evidence of its divinity. Our Savior exhibited this evidence in its full strength. He delivered doctrines which were really excellent, and bore clear marks of truth and divinity. He left his hearers to feel the excellence of his religion, and from their feeling of its energy to conclude for themselves, that it was of heavenly original. It was not by means of his encomiums, but by means of their own perceptions, that great numbers discovered the features of divinity in his discourses." *

Nor are the opinions of orthodox theologians in our own country less at variance with your doctrine that miracles are the only evidence of a divine revelation.

"The holiness of the life of Christ," says President Dwight, "is another proof of the divine origin of the Gospel; a proof not less solid than the miracles, although, perhaps, less frequently allowed its full force." †

An eminent citizen and scholar, of whom this country is justly proud, has devoted a large space in a work on the proofs of revealed religion, to a consideration of the "arguments for the divine origin of Christianity, which may be drawn from

* Gerard's *Genius and Evidence of Christianity*, pp. ix. x. 127, 6, 7.

† Dwight's *Theology*, vol. ii. p. 235.

that internal evidence of truth which its doctrines contain." * "These internal evidences of Christianity," says Mr. Verplanck, "are those on which it is most generally, and far most sincerely and fervently, believed; so that the unlettered Christian, who is utterly ignorant of that body of history and learning which attests the veracity of the Gospel narrative; and who, so far from being able to refute the objections of an ingenious opponent, would find it exceedingly difficult to explain the reasons of his belief to another, may yet possess a ground of confidence in its truth, not resting upon logical argument, yet of a strictly rational character, which, in his mind, could derive but little additional strength from the learned labors of Lardner, the ingenuity of Warburton, or the sagacity of Paley."†

"The most convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity," says one of our most esteemed religious writers, Mr. Jacob Abbott, "is that which results from witnessing its moral power over the human heart. I have often heard it remarked, by men amply qualified to investigate such subjects, that the power of the Bible, as they have often seen it exerted, has made a far stronger impres-

* Verplanck's *Essay on the Evidences*, p. 123.

† *Ibid.* p. 121.

sion upon them, in favor of its DIVINE ORIGIN, than any examination of the LABORED ARGUMENTS of learned men." *

The exclusive doctrine of your Discourse presents a striking contrast to the views of the leading writers, whom, as liberal Christians, we are accustomed to venerate. No class of men have dwelt more earnestly or more successfully on the proof of the divine origin of Christianity, from considerations independent of miracles, than the honored theologians whose names are identified with mental freedom and religious progress in this country.

I commence with Buckminster, whose generous spirit passed away from us too early; in whose presence intolerance stood rebuked; "whose intrepid mind, nothing could depress; whose vigorous understanding broke so easily the little meshes, which were spread to entangle it." The character of Christ was the ground on which he loved to rest his faith in the Gospel; like the Apostle, he saw the divine glory in the face of Jesus. He did not believe, according to the representation of your Discourse, that we can have no "perception," or "intuition" of the truth of

* ABBOTT'S *Young Christian*, p. 145.

Christianity; that outward prodigies are essential to a living faith within the soul; though fond of historical research, and attached to the evidence of miracles, so far from deeming them the only proof of the divinity of the Gospel, he declares that there is much evidence beside them, and superior to them; that a constant study of Christianity furnishes a constant increase of its proofs; and that having satisfied himself, as far as possible, concerning the historical testimony to its truth, the learner should direct his attention to the internal evidence, the character of Christ, the nature of his instructions, and the spirit of the Gospel. "In this way," says Buckminster, "if he is an inquirer of an ingenuous disposition, and of a heart warmed with the love of virtue, he will love the Gospel too well to permit any relics of doubt to disturb him; he will be unable to reject what appears so divine, and what he finds so powerful, or to think it to be any thing else than what he wishes it to be, — the word of God." *

This appears to me to be the soundest theology, clothed in beautiful and impressive language; and it involves more than is obvious on a hasty perusal. It comprises almost every thing, on the

* Buckminster's *Sermons*, (3d Ed.) pp. 18, 19.

present subject, which I should be disposed to contend for. According to this statement, the relics of doubt, which are left, after the historical testimony has produced all the conviction of which it is capable, are removed by an intuitive perception of the divinity of the Gospel. External evidence alone can never completely satisfy the mind; but the inherent character of Christianity shows the ingenuous inquirer, that it is the word of God.

Mr. Buckminster proceeds to illustrate the superiority of the evidence of a divine interposition, taken from the character of Christ, over that derived from the record of miracles. "There is something in the character of Christ, which, to an attentive reader of his history, is of more force than ALL THE WEIGHT of EXTERNAL evidence to prove him DIVINE." * After a masterly portraiture of the character of the Redeemer, showing the fulness of Divinity with which it was pervaded, proving that Christ himself was the great moral miracle, far transcending the outward works which he performed, the Discourse concludes with an express recognition of the power in human nature, to discover the manifestations of God, in the presence of moral sublimity and love-

* BUCKMINSTER'S *Sermons*, (3d Ed.) p. 19.

liness. "Have you caught, my hearers," exclaims this eloquent advocate of Christian truth, "have you caught any glimpses of Jesus? If you believe in him as he was, if you love what you know of him, and imitate what you love, and study to know more and more of his character, you will see that he was in the Father and the Father in him; for the more like God, the perfection of all excellence, you become, the more will you feel all that is godlike in his Son." *

I should look in vain for more appropriate or forcible language than this, to express the doctrine which I deem of such vital importance to the true apprehension of Christianity.

Of a similar faith, as well as of a kindred spirit, with Mr. Buckminster, was his friend and biographer, whose name holds a conspicuous rank in the annals of the New-England clergy. And there have been few, indeed, among the scholars, whose memory is cherished by their native land, who united such clearness of intellect, such unerring good sense, such instinctive delicacy of taste, such aversion to whatever is extravagant in opinion or conduct, with such genuine modesty and sweetness of character, as the late Mr. Thacher. Though personally unknown to me, I cannot remember

* Buckminster's *Sermons*, (3d Ed.) p. 33.

the time when I did not regard him as a being of superior dignity and holiness; the reputation of his mild virtues are associated with my first perception of the moral power of Christianity; the tidings of his decease in a foreign clime threw a gloom over my boyish pleasures; the memory of that hour comes over the long interval of years in connexion with other venerated forms now no more; and shall I ask to be forgiven for this spontaneous tribute to one, whose opinions were at the foundation of his character, whose character is the best commentary on his opinions? I might refer to his whole Sermon on the "Originality of the Christian System," as an illustration of the grounds on which he was accustomed to teach the divine origin of the Gospel; but I will only quote one or two brief passages, which suffice for the purpose that I have in view. "The originality of the doctrines of Christ was such, that he could not have learned them from any human source. This illustrates the divinity of its claims."* The preacher then unfolds his subject, by showing that the idea of a universal religion, the perfect system of human duty, and the originality of the Savior's character, present such conclusive proofs of the divinity of his mission, *independent*

* Thacher's *Sermons*, p. 132.

of other evidence, that it is next to impossible not to believe, "that the God of benevolence in mercy to his children sent his Son on the earth to realize such a character, and to teach us by his perfect example, how we should live, how we should suffer, and a still harder lesson, how we should die." *

The same doctrine is maintained by the late Dr. Parker, whose singular devotion to the practical duties of the ministry did not destroy his interest in theological inquiry, nor lead him to neglect the nicer discriminations of truth and the evidence on which it rests. "When we look at the teachings of Jesus," he says, "it would seem as if he had conversed with the spirits of light, and were bringing down to earth their radiant conceptions of truth; as if he had indeed been in the bosom of the Father, and were commissioned to bring to men his counsels; as if *he needed no other testimony than the very lessons which he taught*, to the truth of his own declaration, 'My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me.'" † "Even MIRACLES, though they might convince the mind, yet could hardly have reached the character with a transforming power, independently of the NATURE OF THE INSTRUCTIONS dispensed. These were

* THACHER'S *Sermons*, pp. 141, 142. † PARKER'S *Sermons*, p. 171.

such as find an advocate in every unperverted mind, and every uncorrupted heart. They come with divine power to the conscience. They are adapted to the actual wants of man's spiritual nature. Herein lies their divine efficacy. They suit the necessities alike of the child, and of the philosopher." * "They have been found adapted to the condition and wants of the most cultivated minds; and let the human race go on for a hundred centuries in improvement, yet Christianity will be still in advance of them, still the pioneer of their onward progress. This is a wonderful fact, considering the circumstances under which our religion was promulgated, and *attests with power the divine authority* of its founder, and his adaptation to his great and godlike work." †

Such were the views of a man, who certainly could not be accused of indifference to the moral wants of the community; whose practical good sense enabled him to judge what kind of evidence was best suited to make a deep impression on the majority of minds; and prevented him from being imposed on by the semblance of truth, instead of its reality; he saw that there was other testimony to the Gospel beside the works of Jesus; he was

* Parker's *Sermons*, p. 174. † *Ibid.* p. 175.

alive to the proofs of its divinity from its effects on the human soul; for his experience was large; and he was compelled to trace the influence he had witnessed to a heavenly source.

I come now to the evidence, that the doctrine of your Discourse is contradictory to the opinions of those living writers, who have contributed in no small degree to the establishment and support of a liberal theology in our churches. But while I bring forward their testimony in opposition to your exclusive doctrine, let me not be understood to pretend to their countenance in any real or supposed errors of my own. I would not claim the support even of those I so much esteem for any opinions which are looked on with suspicion. They may agree with me in the rejection of your theory of the Christian evidence, while they agree in nothing else. I refer to the public expression of their views, merely to show that they do not regard the evidence of miracles, as the only proof of the divine origin of Christianity.

"The internal evidences of Christianity," says a writer in the "Christian Examiner," "is a subject, which is every day growing in importance and interest. Without going into the inquiry how far the alleged miracles of Christianity are fitted to keep alive a veneration for it in future ages, we feel no hesitation in saying, that the time has come

when the attention is to be more and more directed to the indication of its origin borne on its features, — to the cast of its doctrines and morality, — to its tendency, spirit, and object. These are evidences, of the force of which all feel capable of judging. They are more within our reach, fall more immediately under our observation, than some other species of evidence. They are not of a perishable character, not temporary and fading. They multiply and strengthen with age. They have a sort of universal presence. They are felt wherever Christianity is received. The evidence from miracles, however satisfactory, is by its nature more local and confined. It overpowers the understandings of spectators, but time takes something from its freshness and strength. For ourselves, we are disposed to rely much on the marks of a heavenly origin, that Christianity bears on the face of it. We think, that we may appeal with confidence to its internal evidences. They form one of our strong holds, which we do not fear ever being compelled to surrender. Should it be abandoned, Christianity would be in great danger of falling." *

" Christianity," says another writer in the same

* *Christian Examiner*, vol. iii. p. 141. Art. on Jenyns' Internal Evidence, by Alvan Lamson.

Journal, "embodies a collection of moral and vital truths, and THESE TRUTHS, apart from ALL HISTORY or philosophy, constitute Christianity itself. Instead, therefore, of perplexing and confounding the young with what are called the evidences of Christianity, give them Christianity itself. Begin by giving them Christianity itself, as exhibited in the life and character of the Lord Jesus, as illustrated by his simple, beautiful, and touching parables, and as it breathes through all his discourses. They will FEEL IT TO BE TRUE. Depend upon it, paradoxical as it may sound, children will be much more likely to believe Christianity without what are called the evidences, than with them; and the remark applies to some who are not children. Why talk to one about the argument from prophecy, or the argument from miracles, when these are the very points and the only points on which his mind, from some peculiarity in its original constitution, or from limited information, chiefly labors. Give him Christianity itself, by which we mean the body of moral and vital truths which constitutes Christianity. Observe it when you will, you will find that the doubts and difficulties, suggested by children, relate almost exclusively to the HISTORY of Christianity, or to what are called the EXTERNAL evidences of Christianity, and not to the TRUTH of

Christianity itself. Give them Christianity itself; for if they believe in that, it is enough. Nothing can be more injudicious than to persist in urging the argument from miracles on a mind, that from any cause has thus become indifferent, and perhaps impatient of it. How idle to think to convince a person of Christianity by miracles, when it is these very miracles, and not Christianity, that he doubts. The instances, we suspect, are not rare, even of adults, who are *first converted to Christianity itself*, and afterwards, through the moral and spiritual change which Christianity induces, are brought to believe entirely and devoutly in its *miraculous origin and history.*"*

"There is another evidence of Christianity," says Dr. Channing, "still more INTERNAL than any on which I have yet dwelt, an evidence to be FELT rather than described, but not less REAL, because founded on feeling. I refer to that conviction of the divine original of our religion, which springs up and continually gains strength in those who apply it habitually to their tempers and lives, and who imbibe its spirit and hopes. In such men, there is a consciousness of the adaptation of Christianity to their noblest faculties; a con-

* *Christian Examiner*, vol xiv. pp. 192, 193, 197. Art. on M'Ilvaine's Evidences, by JAMES WALKER.

sciousness of its exalting and consoling influences, of its power to confer the true happiness of human nature, to give that peace, which the world cannot give; which assures them that it is not of earthly origin, but a ray from the Everlasting Light, a stream from the fountain of Heavenly Wisdom and Love. This is the evidence which sustains the faith of thousands, who never read and cannot understand the learned books of Christian apologists, who want perhaps words to explain the ground of their belief, but whose faith is of adamantine firmness, who hold the Gospel with a conviction more intimate and unwavering than mere arguments ever produced." *

The last testimony I shall present against the doctrine, that miracles are the only evidence of a divine revelation, that the external evidence is every thing and the internal evidence nothing, is from the Reviewer of Verplanck's "Internal Evidences" in the "Christian Examiner."

"It seems to be part of the economy of Providence in relation to Christianity, that there should be some kind of evidence or other adapted to the character of every mind. While one rests satisfied with the HISTORICAL, and internal critical evidence, and thinks himself an incompetent judge

* CHANNING'S *Discourse at the Dudleian Lecture*, p. 34.

of the MORAL INTERNAL evidence, another recurs to the latter, as the 'grander, broader, and more powerful.' We rejoice in the power and the concurrence of BOTH to establish the same truth. *The adaptation of Christianity to the nature of man*, and its conformity with what we know of the character of God, is unquestionably, to him who will reflect upon it, a very powerful evidence of its DIVINE ORIGIN." *

This article I have always heard ascribed to your own pen; and if this be correct, it only shows that in some instances, a change of opinion may not be a "crime;" and that even wise and good "men throw out their opinions rashly, reserving to themselves the liberty of correcting them, if they are wrong. If you would know for what doctrines they hold themselves responsible, you must look to their last publication." †

The doctrine of your Discourse is still more forcibly contradicted in the following passage from a work which bears your name. "The wisdom and the self-restraint, for so it is to be considered, of our Savior, in confining his teaching to the essential truths of religion, and the broad distinction which he thus made between

* *Christian Examiner*, vol. ii. pp. 131, 132.

† *Discourse*, Note ii. p. 61.

these and all other doctrines, appear to me among the most striking proofs of the divinity of his mission. I cannot believe that a merely human teacher would have conducted himself with such perfect wisdom ; — that he would have succeeded in communicating to his disciples those principles, which are the foundation of all religion and morality, without perplexing their minds by the discussion of any topics less important ; and at last, have left his doctrine a monument for all future time." *

You will not imagine, I trust, that this array of authorities, which might be increased to an indefinite extent, is brought forward as a refutation of the doctrine of your Discourse. Its truth or falsehood is not to be determined by an appeal to distinguished names. It must stand or fall according to its own intrinsic character ; and if you can establish it by probable arguments, in a regular course of reasoning, I shall not hesitate to admit it, although contrary to the opinion of so many eminent theologians. No sincere inquirer after truth will reject an idea, which has substantial evidence in its favor, from the simple fact that it is new. Every important discovery in

* Norton's *Statement of Reasons*, p. 327.

morals and science, for a long time, has to bear the reproach of novelty. If that were the only objection to your theory, I should certainly think it idle to call it in question.

But, when you describe the doctrine opposed to your own, as "the latest form of infidelity"; when you charge those who rest their belief in Christianity on its internal evidence, with denying their Master; when you more than intimate that all, who do not accept the views which you propose, are incapable of sound thinking and unworthy to bear the office of Christian teachers; it becomes important to show that the accusation which you bring recoils upon yourself; that you have been guilty of rashness and injustice in stigmatizing an opinion as a dangerous innovation, which has been held by the purest lights of the Church, in ancient and modern times.

II. I proceed now to consider your doctrine, that miracles are the only evidence of a divine revelation, in another point of view.

It is contrary to the clear and express teachings of the Scriptures, both of the Old and the New Testament. Whatever importance they attach to the evidence of miracles, in support of the claims of divine messengers, — and that is an interesting topic of theological inquiry, — they give

no sanction to your doctrine, that miracles are the sole and exclusive proof of the interposition of God. They appeal to many other considerations; they advance the principle, that the Almighty has spoken to his children in "divers manners," as well as at "sundry times"; now in the cool of the day, among the trees of the garden, and now in the glow of the burning bush; now in the visions of the night, when deep sleep falleth on man, and now in the smoke and storm of the flaming mount; now in the audible voice which made the flesh to quake, and now in the obscure monition which sent a thrill through the heart. The prophet is watching for the manifestation of Jehovah, but he is taught that the Holy One is not limited in his access to his creatures. A great and strong wind rends the mountains, and divides the rocks; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still, small voice; and the prophet hides his face and stands before the Lord. The Pharisees also desired of Jesus a sign from Heaven; they could not see his Divinity in his deeds of beneficence and might, in the inspiration that breathed over his soul, and dwelt upon his lips, in the celestial wisdom with which he

uttered the holiest truths, or in the moral perfection which proved him to be the beloved Son of God; they demanded some signal and overwhelming displays of miraculous power, they insisted that the credentials of the Messiah should be written on the sky, they were blind to the most convincing proofs, when not in accordance with their previous conceptions; but Jesus does not recognise the justice of their claim; an evil and an adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; when he had already told them, that he who doeth the will of his Father shall know of the doctrine, whether it were from God, or whether he spake of himself.

These general considerations are established by a more particular examination of the testimony of Scripture. We shall find, in the course of our inquiry, that the messengers of God never appeal to an exclusive kind of evidence in support of their mission; least of all, to that which you pronounce to be the only infallible criterion.

1. In the first place, the Scriptures present examples of divine messengers, who performed no miracles, as the seal of their authority. They appear in the name of the Lord; they speak as his vicegerents; they profess to bear a revelation of truth from Heaven to men; they claim to be heard not on their own account, but on account

of the divine commission with which they were charged; they are received, in that character, by the people to whom they are sent; subsequent teachers bear witness to their claims; Christ himself refers to them as the messengers of God; their names have been held sacred in every age of the Church; and the denial of their mission has always been reckoned the confession of infidelity.

Now if the doctrine of your Discourse, that miracles are the only credentials of a divine messenger, be correct, it follows that the prophets, to whom I allude, pretended to the authority of God without any foundation for their claims. They spoke, when they were not commanded; they ran, when they were not sent; they declared their own imaginations, as the oracles of God; for the only seal of their commission was wanting; they wrought no miracles, and yet professed to be divine messengers.

Is it necessary to bring specific instances, with which the Bible abounds, in support of my argument? I begin with Samuel. The Lord called him when a child. He spoke to him in visions of the night. The soul of the youthful Hebrew was visited with the spirit from on high. He was established to be the prophet of the Lord. A revelation of divine truth was made to him in

Shiloh.* His whole life was passed in direct communications with God, and in announcing the divine messages to the people. No stronger language is used in the Bible concerning the divine mission of any one, than of this prophet. Yet he performed no miracle in proof of his claims. He gave no outward sign of his authority. The assurance of his inspiration was in the truth which he announced.

Will you admit that Samuel was a divine messenger? Then you abandon the ground you have taken, and acknowledge that there is evidence of a divine commission other than miracle. Do you deny that Samuel was a divine messenger? Then you contradict the express assertion of the Bible, the universal opinion of the Church, and expose yourself to an accusation, which I trust you do not deserve, and which I will not bring.

I next refer to the prophet Jeremiah. He was consecrated from his birth to be the messenger of God; the Lord ordained him a prophet to the nations; he was anointed with the Holy Spirit, so that his soul was filled with a higher strength than his own; the timidity of childhood was overcome; and while the dew of his youth was fresh upon him, he became as an iron pillar and a brazen

* 1 Sam. iii. 4 – 10, 15, 20, 21.

wall, against the kings, and the princes, and the priests of the land.* He was so fully conscious of acting under a divine commission, that he not only announced his message with the authority of God, but detected the false pretensions of those who claimed a similar commission, without being divinely sent. He was able to separate between the chaff and the wheat, between the dreams of the fancy and the words of Jehovah; but he made use of no outward criterion; he presented none himself; he judged the false prophets by the inherent character of their message; he rested his own authority on the same evidence; he wrought no miracle, yet he declared the word of God; and the proof of its divinity was in its effects; the fire which melted the obdurate spirit, the hammer which brake in pieces the rocky heart, were no invention of man, but the work of God.†

I need not go through the "goodly fellowship of the prophets" for further examples of the fact, that divine messengers were sent, whose mission was not confirmed by the testimony of miracles. Your doctrine would disperse that glorious company, dim the light that crowned their heads, rob their word of the divinity which it claimed, steal away the inspiration which rested on their souls,

* Jer. i. 5, 7, 18. † Jer. xxiii. 28, 29.

and reduce them from the sublime distinction of prophets of Jehovah to the level of Jewish enthusiasts.

I will close this part of the discussion with the example of John the Baptist, the forerunner and friend of the Messiah. He was declared by the highest authority to be a prophet, whom no one born of woman could surpass.* Yet John wrought no miracle.† What is your view of the mission of John? Was it from Heaven, or of men? If you say, from Heaven, you take back your doctrine. If you say, of men, you oppose the declaration of Christ.

2. In the second place, the Scriptures present examples of divine messengers, who, although they performed miracles, did not appeal to them as the SOLE evidence of their mission. If they sometimes referred to their miracles as proofs that they were commissioned from Heaven, it is far from being the case, that they never referred to any thing else. An examination of the mode in which they presented their claims to dvine authority will show you that your exclusive ground cannot be maintained.

We need only consider some passages in the history of our Savior himself.

* Luke vii. 28. † John x. 41.

When John the Baptist sent from the prison to inquire of Jesus, whether he were indeed the Messiah, or whether the coming of another were still to be expected, Jesus, in the first place, directs the attention of the messengers to the works which he performed. They were the acknowledged credentials of the Messiah. But this was not all. He does not confine himself to the mention of the miracles. He does not speak of them in a way which would lead one to suppose that he regarded them as the exclusive testimony to his mission. He connects them with another fact, not miraculous in its character, to which, for aught that appears in the narrative, he attaches equal importance, as to the miracles themselves. While he bids the disciples declare to John, that "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the dead are raised up," he adds, "and the poor have the gospel preached to them." * This latter circumstance was the fulfilment of prophecy; the Gospel, the doctrine of truth, of holiness, and love, was now proclaimed; it was announced to the poor; the great idea of human brotherhood received a practical illustration; and this fact, no less than the miraculous display of power, was declared to John as a proof that the Messiah had come.

* Matt. xi. 2–7.

On another memorable occasion, — and one which brings the character of Jesus and the nature of his doctrine into a strong light, — our Savior enjoins the importance of a spiritual faith on those who had just witnessed an external miracle of a very impressive kind. They had eaten of the loaves which he had multiplied by his miraculous power ; but the wonder failed to produce any religious effect on their minds ; they came to Christ with views of a grossly selfish and material character ; and upon his speaking to them of the duty of belief in him as the messenger of God, they immediately asked for an outward sign, as a foundation of their faith ; they wished to see something still more extraordinary than what they had yet witnessed ; Moses had fed their fathers with manna in the desert ; and they demanded a similar or a greater miracle. Jesus gave no countenance to these vain wishes. He virtually tells them, that his character and doctrine bear their own evidence with them ; that they need no outward signs in confirmation of their divinity ; that the true bread of God is that which cometh down from Heaven, and giveth life to the world, in his person. He expresses his surprise, that though they have seen him, they do not believe ; intimating that they are without excuse, that they have plenary evidence in the character of his doctrine of its divine origin, and

that all who were "drawn of the Father," who possessed a spirit kindred with his own, would recognise the truth which he taught, and receive spiritual life from its influence.* It appears that this was a hard saying to not a few; it gave great offence; many of his disciples from that time walked with him no more;† the materialists of Galilee must needs have the visible manna from the sky; to them "there was no intuition, no direct perception, of the truth of Christianity."‡

Once more, we find the same doctrine announced in the sublime conversation between our Savior and Pilate, previous to his crucifixion. "Art thou a king then?" asks the Roman Governor. "Jesus answered, Thou sayest truth; for I am a king. To this end was I born; and for this cause did I come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." Now if the mind of Jesus had ever admitted the idea, that miraculous evidence was essential to the confirmation of truth; that nothing but external signs could attest his Divinity; it is plain that he could not have uttered the declaration, which follows, "Every one that is of the truth, heareth my voice."§ Is there not here an express recognition of the power of the soul to perceive spiritual truth? Is

* John vi. 25 – 59. † John vi. 66. ‡ *Discourse*, p. 32.
§ John xviii. 37.

there not a faculty in the spirit of man, when true to its birth of the Spirit of God, to commune with the Infinite Mind, to behold the Divinity in the manifestations of truth? Hath not man an ear to hear the voice of the Son of God? And without reference to this primary fact in human nature, what rational construction can be put on such language, so often uttered by Christ?

It is unnecessary to multiply examples, in which Jesus refers to the testimony of the soul, with no less confidence than to the evidence of miracles. The distinctness, the power, the earnest conviction with which he does this, in the midst of a sensual and idolatrous age, the calm and clear insight into the invisible nature of man, which he ever displayed, the anticipation of spiritual truth as the common patrimony of the race, which he cherished when all experience was against him, but which subsequent experience tends to confirm, are, I own, to my mind, among the strongest proofs of his divine mission. They seem to me to reveal the peculiar presence of God in the Spirit of Christ. They are signs of a divine inspiration more forcible to me, than a visible sign from Heaven.

I will conclude the discussion of this topic with a brief reference to the manner in which the Apostle Paul presents the evidence of the

religion, of which he was so powerful an advocate. He did not limit himself to the proof from miracles. He allowed every important consideration in favor of Christianity its due place. Now he spoke of the resurrection of Christ; now of the fulfilment of prophecy; now of the external signs which had been wrought by him; and now of the intrinsic divinity of the Gospel itself. While the Jews demanded a new miracle; while the Greeks sought after wisdom; while the sages of the schools, and the disputers of the world, saw nothing but foolishness in the doctrine of Christ; Paul persisted in preaching it; he knew that it was filled with a divine life; and that they who were called to its enjoyment, they whose souls were in unison with its spirit, would intuitively perceive that it was the wisdom of God, and the power of God.*

Still further, Paul declares in the account of his ministry, which he gives to the Corinthians, that he relied for success on the sincerity of his purpose, and on the clearness and energy with which he proclaimed Christianity as the revelation of God. He has renounced, as he tells them, the hidden things of dishonesty; he exhibits the word of God without craft or deceit; and appeals to the con-

* 1 Cor. i. 20–24.

science by the manifestation of truth. There could hardly be a more distinct statement of the principle, that moral truth is addressed to the moral nature of man, and finds its strongest support in the testimony of the soul. It was the opinion of Paul, that beside the miraculous displays of power, which he had witnessed and of which he had been the subject, there was another evidence of the divinity of the Gospel; for it commended itself to the human consciousness; it was in accordance with the divine law written upon the heart; and none but they who were lost to their better nature, could fail to perceive in it the revelation of God.*

The Apostle continues to speak of the light which had been granted, enabling him to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.† His meaning cannot be better illustrated, than by the following admirable remarks from the most profound theologian, whom this country has produced. "If a sight of Christ's outward glory might give a rational assurance of his divinity, why may not an apprehension of his spiritual glory do so too? Doubtless Christ's spiritual glory is in itself as distinguishing, and as plainly showing his divinity, as his outward glory, and a great deal more. For

* 2 Cor. iv. 1 - 4. † 2 Cor. iv. 6.

his spiritual glory is that wherein his divinity consists; and the outward glory of his transfiguration showed him to be divine, only as it was a remarkable image or representation of that spiritual glory. Doubtless, therefore, he that has had a clear sight of the spiritual glory of Christ may say, 'I have not followed cunningly devised fables, but have been an eye witness of his majesty,' upon as good grounds as the Apostle, when he had respect to the outward glory of Christ that he had seen. A true sense of the divine excellency of the things of God's word doth more directly and immediately convince of the truth of them; and that because the excellency of these things is so superlative. There is a beauty in them that is so divine and Godlike, that is greatly and evidently distinguishing of them from things merely human, or that men are the inventors and authors of; a glory, that is so high and great, that when clearly seen, commands assent to their divinity and reality. The evidence, which they who are spiritually enlightened have of the truth of the things of religion, is a kind of intuition and immediate evidence. They believe the doctrines of God's word to be divine, because they see divinity in them. That is, they see a divine and transcendent and most evidently distinguishing glory in them; such a glory, as, if clearly seen,

does not leave room to doubt of their being of God, and not of men." *

III. In the third place, we find express passages in the Scriptures, which prove that miracles are not the only evidence of divine revelation. The instances, which we have already considered, are sufficient to authorize the conclusion, that the exclusive doctrine of your Discourse is in opposition to the Bible; but I am unwilling to dismiss this branch of the subject, without a more immediate reference to certain scriptural declarations, which imply the necessity of various kinds of evidence, as proof of a divine commission.

In the instructions of Moses, of the Prophets, of the Apostles, of Christ himself, we often meet with allusions to the danger of deception, of receiving a mere pretender to divine authority, as the messenger of God. We are told that false prophets will appear; that they will advance such plausible claims as will impose on the unwary; that they will work miracles in support of their mission, similar in outward appearance to those which are truly divine; and accordingly there must be some standard other than that of miracles, by which to judge of the truth of their pretensions. If miracles be the SOLE evidence of a

* EDWARDS' *Works*, vol. viii. pp. 300, 305, 306.

divine commission, and if apparent miracles be performed, it is impossible to preserve any logical strictness, and to avoid the conclusion that the miracle-worker is from God. Is it said that these miracles are false, while those of the divine messenger are true? But how do we know that? In external appearance, a false miracle is the same as a true one; both are extraordinary changes in the physical world; they differ only in their hidden causality; and that is a matter of inference; we ascribe the one to divine power, and the other to human art, because we have some grounds, beside the extraordinary character of the event, for believing the interposition of God, in the one case, while, in the other, we have no such grounds. It follows, accordingly, from the declarations of the Bible, that, if there be no evidence of a divine mission but miracles, even the evidence of miracles itself is destroyed. I will briefly consider a few passages which relate to this point.

Among the counsels, which the Hebrew Lawgiver imparts to his people, he takes occasion to speak of the case of a pretended prophet. Many such cases would probably occur. "If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, [performs a visible miracle,] and the sign or the wonder come to pass, thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that

prophet or that dreamer of dreams; if he say, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death, because he hath spoken to turn you away from the Lord your God." *

The principle involved in these directions is so evident, that it can scarcely escape the notice of the most inattentive reader. A prophet is supposed to make his appearance among the people of the land; he claims a divine commission from his god, though not from Jehovah; he works a miracle in proof of his claims; he gives a sign, and the sign comes to pass; but yet he is to be rejected, and put to death. His apparent miracle is to be judged by a higher standard; it is to be brought to the test of the doctrine advanced; that decides it to be false, though it had every external proof in its favor; and to reverse the case, and apply the principle here stated to the evidences of Christianity, it is the divinity of the Christian doctrine, which substantiates the divinity of the Christian miracles.

Again, Jesus declares in the most solemn manner, that the power of working miracles was so far from being the only evidence of a divine com-

* Deut. xiii. 1 – 5.

mission, that it was not even a proof of a good character. A man, he asserts, may perform miracles in his name, may utter prophecies, may cast out devils, and, at the same time, be a worthless man, and rejected, at the day of judgment, from the kingdom of Heaven.* Now if miracles alone cannot substantiate a claim to the favor of God, and a good moral character, it is clear that miracles alone cannot form the credentials of a divine messenger; for the supposition that the Deity would commission a bad man to make a revelation of his will is blasphemy. Our Savior himself presents the criterion. When he warns his hearers "to beware of false prophets," he immediately adds, "ye shall know them by their fruits."† Just as you see that a cluster of grapes on the vine is not a bunch of thistles, you can perceive the presence of the Divinity in the moral glory of the divine messenger.

Again, in the description of the dangers to which his disciples would be exposed in the perilous times that were to succeed his death, Jesus predicts, "that there shall arise false Christs and false prophets," with such specious pretensions, "that if it were possible they would deceive the very elect."‡ Now in what manner was the fal-

* Matt. vii. 21 - 23. † Matt. vii. 15 - 20. ‡ Matt. xxiv. 24.

lacy of their pretensions to be detected? Not by bringing them to the test of miracles. For these they were able to perform, as far as the external appearance was concerned. "They would show great signs and wonders." These would deceive many; for every extraordinary event was thought to indicate a peculiar manifestation of God. But the elect would not be deluded by their pretensions. They who had understood the mind of Christ, who had received the essential spirit of his instructions, would look for a deeper meaning in every alleged divine commission, than was signified by outward wonders; they would make the character of the revelation the test of its truth; and finding no inward signs of divinity, would reject its claims.

Again, the same principle is expressed in the direction of the Apostle Paul to the Galatians, in regard to their treatment of those who were thought to pervert the doctrine of Christ. "For though an angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel to you than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." * According to the doctrine of your Discourse, the preaching of an angel would be a signal proof of a divine revelation. It would be a conspicuous miracle, of which no

* Galatians i. 8.

one could stand in doubt. What need, you would say, of further evidence? Not so Paul. He expressly commands the disciples to receive nothing on the authority of an angel, unless it was approved by a higher standard. A miracle alone in his view was not sufficient; the character of the doctrine must determine the weight of the miracle; the internal evidence of divinity must be added to the external testimony of miracle, or even the latter would lose its force.

In like manner, Paul alludes to the coming of a "wicked one," who should exhibit "all power, and signs, and lying wonders";* who would deceive many; but because they cherished no "love of the truth," no taste for its revelation as made by the messengers of God. A pure love of truth, "a sense of divine things," would lead its possessor to reject the falsehood, notwithstanding the apparent miracles with which it was propped up. According to Paul, a certain criterion of truth is to be found in the intrinsic character of the doctrine; according to your Discourse, this criterion is of no value whatever; for "there can be no intuition, no direct perception of the truth of Christianity."†

* 1 Thess. ii. 9, 10. † *Discourse*, p. 32.

I have thus shown, as I trust, that the position which you assume is at variance with the general belief of the Christian Church, and with the express testimony of the Scriptures. I might now proceed to point out the philosophical objections which it labors under, and which adapt it rather to increase the difficulties of unbelievers, than to diminish any form of infidelity. But these have been recently stated in such an able manner, that I need not pursue the subject in this place.*

There are several objections, however, of a practical character that apply to the doctrine of your Discourse, and the connexion in which it is presented, which I cannot pass over without notice.

I. The doctrine, that miracles are the only evidence of a divine revelation, if generally admitted, would impair the religious influence of the Christian ministry. It would separate the pastor of a church from the sympathies of his people, confine him in a sphere of thought remote from their usual interests, and give an abstract and scholastic character to his services in the pulpit. The great object of his endeavors would be to demonstrate the truth of the Christian history; the

* See *Boston Quarterly Review*, Jan. 1839.

weapons of his warfare would be carnal, and not spiritual; drawn from grammars, and lexicons, and mouldy traditions, not from the treasures of the human heart. The miracles being established to the satisfaction of an inquisitive generation, nothing would remain but to announce the truth on their authority; for as all other evidence is without value, and this alone sufficient, it would be a waste of time to direct the attention to the divine glory of Christ and his revelation; this is beyond the reach of human "perception"; none but enthusiasts can make use of it. The minister would rely for success on his skill in argument, rather than on his sympathy with man; on the knowledge he gains within the walls of the University, rather than on the experience which may be learned in the homes of his people. He would trust more to his logical demonstration of the evidences of Christianity, than to the faithful exhibition of Christian truth to the naked human heart. But, I believe, not a wise and experienced pastor can be found, who will not say that, as a general rule, the discussion of the historical evidence is ill adapted to the pulpit, and that the effects of such preaching on society at large, or on the individual conscience, are too minute to be estimated.

It is not surprising, however, that with only a theoretical acquaintance with the duties of the pastor, an undue stress should be laid on the practical value of arguments derived from historical learning. We bring this prejudice with us from the schools. We suppose that what was effectual in the exercises of the class, will be equally effectual in the instructions of the church. We imagine that the busy men and women of our congregations, "careful and troubled about many things," will be deeply interested in questions that deeply interest ourselves. Thus, it is well if we do not spend many years in proving that the Gospels were written by the persons whose names they bear, while we have no insight into the divine truth which beams from their pages, and which needs only to be sincerely set forth, to find access to the soul of man, and, by the might of the Holy Ghost, from which it came, to purify and regenerate society. In this way, to a considerable extent, we almost unconsciously pursue the course which you recommend, of presenting miracles as the sole evidence of Christianity. But, I cannot say, that my experience or observation at all confirms your ideas. I am not aware, that bad men have been made good, or good men better, to so great a degree, by the method which you advise, as to encourage a repetition of the experiment.

On the contrary, I have known great and beneficial effects to arise from the simple exhibition of the truth of the Gospel to the heart and conscience, by earnest men, who trusted to the intuitive power of the soul, for the perception of its divinity. The revelation of Christ is addressed to the better nature of man; "my sheep," said he, "hear my voice, and follow me, and I give unto them eternal life"; "the light shines in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not," but the "children of light" look upward and are blest; it meets with a cordial reception from those who are burdened with the consciousness of sin, who are seeking for higher things, who are "feeling after God, if haply they may find him"; and this fact is the foundation of the minister's success. If you confine him to the demonstration of the miracles; if you deny him intimate access to the soul, by the truth which he bears; if you virtually tell him that the internal evidence of Christianity is a delusion, that our personal experience of its power is no proof of its divinity, and that the glorious Gospel of the blessed God is to be believed only because learned men vouchsafe to assure the humble Christian of its truth; you deprive the minister of all inward force; you make him little better than a logical machine; and much as I value a sound logic in its proper

place, I am sure it is not the instrument which is mighty through God to the pulling down of the strong holds of sin. It may detect error; but it cannot give so much as a glimpse of the glory of Christ. It may refute fallacies; but it cannot bind the heart to the love of holiness. A higher power is necessary for this purpose; and such a power God has granted to man in the divine gift of Christianity, which corresponds to his inmost wants, and bears the pledge of its truth in its effects on the soul.

II. I object again to your exclusive principle, on account of its injurious bearing on the character of a large portion of the most sincere believers in Christ. We have already seen, that, pressed to its logical consequences, it denies the Christian name to all who do not receive Christianity in the method which you prescribe. For it is clear, that if Christianity be founded ONLY on its historical evidence, he, who does not receive it on that evidence, cannot strictly be said to receive it at all. But I will not believe that you intend to enforce this conclusion on the great mass of Christians who differ from you, — for whose dulness and ignorance you may find some excuse, — although you do not hesitate to apply it to those whose studies and profession ought to have furnished them with better information.

Still it is not a "sweet and pleasant thing,"* for an unlearned believer in Christ to be told that he is building on an imperfect foundation, and that the temple of his faith is but "wood, hay, and stubble," though he "may be saved, yet so as by fire." For, at all events, it calls in question either his honesty or his judgment. It implies that he either knows the foundation is bad,

* "Surely it is a sweet and pleasant thing to tell and to hear together of the great things which God has done for our souls," observes the Reverend Fielding Ould of Liverpool, when he invites the liberal Christians of that city to come to his church, and hear themselves proved to be infidels.

The answer of the ministers, whose congregations he thus appealed to, is equally manly, and applicable to those similarly circumstanced, on both sides of the water. "When good men differ from each other, it is 'sweet and pleasant,' to reason together, and prove all things, and whatsoever things are pure, and true, and lovely, to think on these things, provided that both parties are conscious of their liability to error, and are anxious to learn as well as to teach; that each confides in the integrity, ingenuousness, and ability of the other; that each applies himself with reasons to the understanding, not with terrors to the will. But such conference is not 'sweet and pleasant,' where, fallibility being confessed on one side, infallibility is assumed on the other; where one has nothing to learn and every thing to teach; where the arguments of an equal are propounded as a message of inspiration."

For an interesting account of the controversy thus stated, see the "Christian Examiner," for September, 1839. The great principles, which are so ably set forth in the pamphlets already come to hand, are welcomed by many hearts here. They must be cheering to the friends of mental freedom everywhere.

and is therefore insincere; or he does not know it, and is therefore imposed upon. His integrity can be preserved only at the expense of his insight. He may be deluded; if not, he is a hypocrite. Either supposition is any thing but agreeable. I should not like to use such language to a man for whose soul it was my duty to watch.

I know not a few individuals, — neither very wise, nor very unwise, compared with the average of men, — certainly not persons qualified by the "knowledge of which extensive learning commonly makes a part," to express an opinion on the subject, who still venture, with a modest confidence, to assume the name of Christians. They inform me that they obtain no satisfaction from such works as Paley's "Evidences of Christianity," or Lardner's "Credibility of the Gospel History." Books of this character do not speak to their condition; their minds are so constructed as to be little affected by such reasonings; but yet the truth of Christianity commends itself to their souls; and they believe in Christ, because they behold his glory. They do not even question the divine origin of Christianity; they would as soon think of asking whether the sun shines at noon; and cheerful and contented in their faith, they leave the problems, which require curious historical research, to scholars, whose business it is to deal with them.

I have known many persons of this description; indeed, if I am not greatly deceived, they are to be found in all our congregations; I have witnessed their unobtrusive piety in the daily walks of life; I have visited them in scenes of deepest sorrow; I have stood at the side of their death-beds; and I could no more doubt their genuine Christian faith, because it was not the product of historical evidence, than I could deny the skill of one of our native artists, because it did not grow up from the study of classic models.

This experience is confirmed by the testimony of an eminent man, already quoted, who, whatever portion of truth he might have failed to perceive, it would be extreme folly to doubt, was conversant with the workings of the soul, in the affairs of religion, as few have ever been, in our country, or in any other. "If the evidence of the Gospel depended only on history, and such reasonings as learned men only are capable of, it would be above the reach of far the greatest part of mankind. But persons with but an ordinary degree of knowledge are capable, without a long and subtile train of reasoning, to see the divine excellency of the things of religion. They are capable of being taught by the Spirit of God, as well as learned men. The evidence, that is this way obtained, is vastly better and more satisfy-

ing, than all that can be obtained by the arguings of those that are the most learned, and the greatest masters of reason. And babes are as capable of knowing these things, as the wise and prudent; and they are often hid from these when they are revealed to those." *

III. The preceding views suggest another fatal objection to the doctrine of your Discourse. It removes Christianity from its strong hold in the common mind, and puts it into the keeping of scholars and antiquaries. I have already hinted at this objection, but it deserves a more particular consideration. It follows, as the necessary consequence of your exclusive hypothesis. For if the truth of Christianity rests entirely on the foundation of historical evidence; if there be nothing in its intrinsic character to commend it to the soul, as the revelation of God; if the uneducated inquirer must make up his mind, either from his own investigations or from the testimony of others, in regard to the subtlest questions of literary criticism, before he can cherish a vital faith in the doctrines of Christ, of course, he resigns his opinions to the guidance of the learned. He must give up his birth-right as a man, before he can establish his faith as a Christian. For he cannot

* Edwards' *Works*, vol. viii. p. 310.

enter into such investigations himself; he has neither the ability, the leisure, nor the apparatus, that is requisite; he must sue at the feet of the scholar for the light which he needs for the salvation of the soul. The "grace and truth" revealed by the Savior become "as the words of a book that is sealed; the book is delivered to him that is not learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee; and he saith, I cannot, for I am not learned." The dark hour of God's displeasure has come back; we hear the prophetic denunciation repeated; "forasmuch as this people have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is *taught by the precept of men;* therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid."

It may appear incredible to many, that you should fully admit this consequence, although it is the inevitable result of your reasonings. There are few minds, at the present day, however wedded to prescription and form, however great their distrust of the mass of the people, that would not shrink from the distinct avowal of such an opinion, even though it were privately cherished. I honor the frankness with which you express it, —

contrasted, as it is, with the ambiguity I have before lamented; a more ingenious defence of the principle, perhaps, cannot be made, than that contained in the Note which you devote to the subject. At all events, we shall look in vain for a clearer statement of the opinion objected to, than the following words. "The full comprehension of the character and evidence of Christianity is the result of *studies which are pursued only by few*, and the *many want capacity* or opportunity to satisfy themselves on the subject by their independent, unassisted exertions." (p. 57.) "It is said, that a *great majority of men are not capable* of investigating for themselves the evidences and character of Christianity, and therefore can have no reasonable foundation for their belief in Christianity. The direct answer is, that TRUST *in the information, judgment, and integrity of others*, to a greater or less extent, as it is a universal and necessary, is also a rational principle of belief." (p. 63.)

The great majority of people, accordingly, having no power to perceive the intrinsic divinity of Christian truth, to behold the glory of God in the character of Christ, are doomed, by the very nature of the case, to dependence on the learned class, for the foundation of their faith.

The first astonishing circumstance connected

with this declaration is, that it was addressed to a body of Christians, whose prominent characteristic is the defence of freedom of mind, — of not only the right, but the duty, and of course, the power of private judgment, to the most unlimited extent. We have claimed to be the very Protestants of the Protestants; our watchword has been, "The people, and not the priests;" we have taken our stand on the broad foundation of the universal mind; we have fought for the inherent privileges of humanity; and if we have, in any degree, secured a hold on the affections of the community; if the term "liberal Christian" is sacred and dear to any hearts among the breathing multitudes around us; it is because we have discarded the lifeless formulas of the schools; because we have sought to make Christianity a vital sentiment, instead of a barren tradition; because we have endeavored to bring the Bible out of the "dusty corners" in which learned speculations had placed it; and boldly appealed to the sense of truth in every man, to SEE and JUDGE for himself what is right.

Again, I cannot but be surprised at the remarkable confusion of the statement, in which you recognise no distinction between the evidence of the truth of physical science and that of moral and religious truth. You assert that "religious

knowledge has the character common to all our higher knowledge, that it requires labor, thought, and learning to attain it." (p. 54.) The truth of Christianity is to be received on the same ground, on which we admit, that "all the motions of the bodies of the solar system in relation to each other are to be referred to the one law of gravity." (p. 58.) The spiritual truths of Christianity are to be ascertained by the same method as the physical truths of astronomy. The growth in the "knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ," which is demanded of the most unlearned believer, is made to depend on the same conditions as the increase of our knowledge of "all subjects, lying beyond the sphere of personal experience." (p. 59.) Our faith no longer proceeds from the "demonstration of the Spirit;" it stands not "in the power of God," but "in the wisdom of men."

But if this theory be true, it not only makes a large proportion of unlettered Christians dependent on scholars for their knowledge of Christ, but actually deprives them of all religious knowledge whatever. They have not the requisite culture even to understand the results of critical investigation; they do not feel sufficient interest in the subject to make any inquiries concerning them; still, they "know" in whom they believe; they have a faith, no less rational, no less enlightened, no

less fervent, than that of the most profound antiquary; for they have the witness in their own hearts; the truths of the Gospels are the very life of their souls; they have seen, and tasted, and been nourished by the bread of God, which came down out of Heaven; and it is in vain to tell them, that they are ignorant of the truth of Christianity, that they have no solid foundation for their faith, because they have not besieged the libraries of the learned, to ask them whether they might believe in Christ or no.

> Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
> Pillow and bobbins all her little store,
> Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
> Shuffling her threads about the livelong day,
> Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night
> Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
> She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
> Has little understanding, and no wit,
> Receives no praise, but though her lot be such,
> (Toilsome and indigent,) she renders much;
> Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true —
> And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
> Her title to a treasure in the skies.

Nor is it merely those whom we speak of in our pride, as the less favored classes, to whom the supply of their daily wants seems like a daily miracle, that are obliged to found their convictions of the truth of Christianity on more direct

evidence, than is furnished by the investigations of science for the truths of astronomy. The learned themselves are often so absorbed in their favorite studies, that they can give little attention to the critical researches of the theologian. Yet, if they are religious men, they feel that their faith is built on stronger evidence than he could supply them with. They do not need to solicit his advice before they can believe in Christianity. They have settled their faith for themselves; and seen, from the intrinsic divinity of the Gospel, that it is the gift of God. They know that different branches of inquiry demand different kinds of evidence; a scholastic logic, with them, is not the only organ of truth; they have confidence in the inward eye, which penetrates where the telescope cannot reach; they do not confound the truths of religion with the discoveries of astronomy, in regard to their manner of proof; and, like our late eminent mathematician, who was a no less sincere Christian than sound philosopher, while they establish the facts of physical science by learned research and subtile calculations, they perceive the truths of the Gospel by the intuitions of the soul. That distinguished man, as we are informed in the beautiful tribute which filial piety has recently offered to his memory, was accustomed to dwell upon "the fitness of the Gospel to purify

the heart and elevate the soul; and preferred to rest its authority upon these views, rather than upon any other;" while the doctrine, that "a belief in miracles is not essential to a belief in Christianity, received his approbation."* A short time before his death, he told a friend, who has since stated the conversation in a public Eulogy,† worthy of the subject and the author, "I cannot remember when I had not the feeling of religious truth and accountability, and when I did not act from it, or endeavor to. In my boyish days, when some of my companions, who had become infected with Tom Paine's infidelity, broached their notions in conversation with me, I battled it with them stoutly, not exactly with the logic you would get from Locke, but with the logic I found *here*, (pointing to his breast;) and here it has always been my guide and support; it is my support still."‡

Still further, the course which you recommend is directly at variance with that pursued by our

* *Memoir of Nathaniel Bowditch*, by his Son, NATHANIEL INGERSOLL BOWDITCH, p. 152.

† See *Eulogy on the Life and Character of Nathaniel Bowditch*, by the HON. DANIEL APPLETON WHITE, p. 53.

‡ See *Memoir*, p. 161.

See also *Discourse on the Life and Character of Dr. Bowditch*, by the REV. ALEXANDER YOUNG, pp. 91, 92.

Savior himself. You maintain, that "extensive learning" is usually requisite for those who would influence their fellow-men on religious subjects. But Jesus certainly did not take this into consideration in the selection of the twelve from the mass of the disciples; he committed the promulgation of his religion to "unlearned and ignorant" men; the sublimest truths were entrusted to the most common minds; and, in this way, "God made foolish the wisdom of the world." You may say, that the choice of instruments was not at the command of Christ; but, I cannot doubt, that, if "extensive learning" had been indispensable, he would have found means to avail himself of its power. You will not maintain that the possession of inspiration removed the necessity of learning, for you inform us, "that neither the teaching of our Savior, nor the influences of God's spirit in enlightening the minds of the apostles, preserved them from all the errors of the age, from the influence of all human prejudices and feelings, from all inconclusive reasoning, or from all ambiguity, impropriety, and insufficiency in the use of language."* In short, notwithstanding the miraculous relations they sustained to God, they were singularly destitute of the qualifications, which,

* *Christian Examiner*, vol. vi. pp. 344, 345. Art. Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

in your view, are essential to the teacher of religion.

He, who "knew what was in man," however, made a far different estimate of the value of artificial culture, compared with the spontaneous wisdom of the healthy, religious soul, when enlightened by the spirit of God, the spirit of truth and goodness. His interview with the doctors in the temple, at twelve years of age, was probably not adapted to increase his confidence in the learned by profession; and his subsequent acquaintance with such minds as produced the Gospel of John and the Epistles of Peter would have proved, if proof were needed, that the soul of man is fitted to perceive the truths of religion, without the aid of extensive erudition. Christ honored man. He felt the worth of the soul. He knew its intimate connexion with God. He believed in the omnipresence of the Deity; but taught, that of all temples the "upright heart and pure" was most acceptable. He saw that the parade of wisdom, which books impart, was as nothing before "the light that enlighteneth every human mind." The whole course of his nation's history was an illustration of the fact, "that poor mechanics are wont to be God's great ambassadors to mankind." Hence, he gave no preference to Nicodemus, that master in Israel, or

to the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea, who, we may presume, had devoted his leisure to the cultivation of his mind, over Matthew the publican, or the sons of the fisherman Zebedee; and while the former were hesitating between their convictions and their comforts at home, the latter were going barefoot from city to city to preach the kingdom of God. Christ established no college of Apostles; he did not revive the school of the prophets which had died out; he paid no distinguished respect to the pride of learning; indeed, he sometimes intimates that it is an obstacle to the perception of truth; and thanks God, that while he has hid the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven from the wise and prudent, he has made them known to men as ignorant as babes of the lore of the schools. Instead of selecting the scribes from the temple, the wise disputers of this world, the cautious Gamaliels who could balance probabilities to a hair, and who knew that no "future investigations would lead them to change their opinions,"* as the depositaries of his doctrine he planted it deep in the minds of Jewish peasants; and while "other teachers have committed their wisdom to writing, lest, being entrusted to words, which are but breath, it should be dis-

* *Discourse*, p. 61.

persed and lost, Jesus confided in the *divine energy of his doctrine*, and with an unconcern truly sublime, cast it abroad to make its own way, and perpetuate its own existence, — sufficient proof that he knew it to be from God."* He was content to entrust the record of his history with unlettered disciples, who were drawn to the cross by the Spirit of the Father, without desiring it to be accompanied with the annotations of "a philosopher of a mind as enlarged as that of Cicero."†

Once more, I am obliged to differ from your conclusions with regard to the practical importance of scholars to the interests of religion. Perhaps I may venture to hope, that I am not likely to be accused of indifference to human learning. But I cannot fall in with the extravagant pretensions that you urge in its favor. I deny that it entitles its possessor to the claim of infallibility. True learning, in my opinion, is as modest as it is inquisitive; it searches for truth with a lowly and reverent aspect; it never counts itself to have yet

* *Sermon* at the Ordination of Rev. W. H. Furness, by Henry Ware, Jr., p. 9.

† See *Christian Examiner*, vol. vi. p. 344. Art. Authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

See also *Spirit of the Pilgrims*, vol. ii. pp. 543, 551–553, where the above sentiment is animadverted on, as "the latest form of infidelity."

attained; it never presumes to assert that it can gain no further light on any subject; conscious of frailty, it communes with all wise teachers; and in meek self-dependence, compares the lessons they announce with the oracles of God. Such learning blesses both its disciples and those to whom they are sent; the former obtain from the latter no less instruction than they give; their reverence for man is too deep to permit the exercise of scorn; and in free and trusting intercourse with all varieties of their fellow men, they feel that they are living to learn; they are growing old in the pursuit of wisdom, with the freshness of children, *γηρασκουσι διδασκομενοι*; and the thought, that no clearer views of truth were yet to visit their minds, would almost bring them to the grave before their time.

A more sincere veneration for human beings I cannot feel, than for scholars of this character. I honor the learned, when they devote their attainments to the service of society; when they cherish a stronger interest in the welfare of their brethren, than in the luxury of their books; when they bring the researches of science to the illustration of truth, the correction of abuses, and the aid of the sufferer; but if they do not acknowledge a higher light than that which comes from the printed page; if they confound the posses-

sion of erudition with the gift of wisdom; and above all, if they presume to interfere in the communion of the soul with God, and limit the universal bounty of Heaven within their "smoky cells," I can only utter my amazement.

Christian truth has always been addressed to the "intuitive perceptions" of the common mind. The Gospel was first preached to the poor; and with the "poor in spirit," those who renounced the pride of learning, who "loved to lie low in God's power," and listen to his secret voice within the heart, it has always found its most faithful friends. A shallow and presumptuous philosophy, — presumptuous, because shallow, — usurps the place of the simplicity of Christ, and would fain smother the breathing life of heavenly truth. Creeds came into the Church with the dreams of speculation; they have been handed down through the dust of the schools; they have sought their principal defence in the subtile, shadowy, and artificial distinctions of the learned; and the most vigorous attacks they have received have come from the unarmed strength of plebeian sects. The sword of the Spirit is not wielded after the tactics of a University; and even a shepherd's sling has often proved more powerful than the spear of a giant.

I rejoice to find the confirmation of these sentiments in the following noble language from a friend of Christian liberty abroad. "Though no one honors scholarship more, or has a profounder veneration for its functions, I yet declare, that Christianity is a religion for the people; that Christ is manifested to the heart and soul of every man whom he attracts by heavenly sympathy; that when not many wise, not many learned were called, the lowly, but honest in heart, recognised the divine brightness, and sat at the feet of Jesus, docile and rejoicing; and I protest altogether against any learned aristocracy, any literary hierarchy, any priestly mediators having more of the true light that lighteth every man, than the humblest of their brethren, who has taken to his heart the free gift of God, and loves the Lord Jesus with sincerity. — The rightful privileges of critics and scholars are large enough, and let no man disown them; but I do disown this literary hierarchy arrogating to themselves sole access to the oracles of God, and limiting Christ's free approach to the souls of the people to long processes of inferential reasonings, and the winding ways of a syllogism. I entreat them to stand aside, and let the living Jesus come into communication with the living heart, and not place themselves, like the multitude who threatened the blind beside

the way, between the ready mercy of the Heavenly Teacher and the humblest follower who seeks his face, that a ray of the light that shineth there may fall upon eager and wistful, though dimmed and earth-stained, eyes."*

I am admonished by the length of this letter, that it is time to bring my examination of your Discourse to a close, although there are several points on which I should gladly comment, that I have left untouched. I have probably said enough, however, to show that the exclusive doctrine which you advance is incapable of support; and that the charge of infidelity against those Christians, whose belief in revelation is not founded on evidence which you approve, was made without due consideration. I trust, also, that my remarks may tend to produce a deeper conviction of the value and power of the internal evidence of our religion; to satisfy the unlearned believer especially, that the doubts cast by critical scholars on the foundation of his faith are unworthy of attention; that he is not following a "cunningly devised fable," when he holds to the divine origin

* *Christianity not the Property of Critics and Scholars, but the Gift of God to all Men.* A Lecture, delivered in Paradise Street Chapel, Liverpool, by Rev. John Hamilton Thom. pp. 17, 20.

of the Gospel; since he is an "eye-witness" of the "majesty" of Christ, and hears a voice from the "excellent glory" of his character, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

I might, accordingly, leave the subject in this place, trusting to the ingenuousness and good sense, which shall be brought to the perusal of my letter, for the formation of a correct judgment on the question that has been discussed.

There are one or two topics, however, of a literary and historical character, — which, though not immediately connected with the subject, are interesting not only to scholars, but to all who desire accurate information in regard to the progress of opinion, — that I could not be excused for neglecting.

You undertake to give some account of the religious opinions of Spinoza, Schleiermacher, and De Wette; in this account you have fallen into several errors, which it is my duty to correct.

I commence with Spinoza, whom, in accordance with a traditional prejudice, you speak of as "a celebrated atheist." (p. 9.) This prejudice was early circulated against Spinoza, as well as against his master, Descartes, on account of the freedom with which they examined received opin-

ions; it was cherished by bigoted and ignorant theologians; the skeptic Bayle, in one of his fits of caprice, zealously upheld it; mainly, I think, through his influence, has it come down to modern times; but there are few scholars, conversant, even in a slight degree, with philosophical studies, that would now give it their sanction.

You assert that "to deny the atheism of Spinoza, is merely to contend, that the word is not to be used in its common and established sense." (p. 45.) Now the very reverse of this statement, as I shall show, would express the truth. Spinoza cannot be called an atheist, unless a meaning be given to the word which it does not usually bear. If you say that it is atheism, to call in question certain prevailing conceptions of the Deity, which agree with your own views, then was Spinoza an atheist; otherwise, he was not. But this is not the sense attached to the word in common language. No usage will justify the application of the term atheist to a man, who believes in the existence of God, though his notions of the Deity may differ from popular opinions, and though they be really defective and erroneous. The Jewish nation certainly were not atheists, because they had not reached the Christian doctrine of a paternal God; still less was the Jewish Spinoza an atheist, because he sought for

more elevated ideas of the Supreme Cause, than were taught by the sensual Rabbis in the synagogue of Amsterdam.

According to the established use of language, in ordinary discourse, particularly in this country, Spinoza was neither an atheist nor a pantheist.

By an atheist, is understood one who denies the existence of an Infinite, Original Cause, on whose power all finite beings depend. A man who admits this can, with no propriety, be called an atheist, whatever be his errors in other respects. Now the doctrine which lies at the foundation of Spinoza's system is the existence of an infinite, first cause; not identical with visible nature, but superior to it, by the whole difference between the infinite and the finite; who possesses intelligence and love; whose nature is perfect, capable of being understood, so far as revealed to man, but in its infinite attributes, incomprehensible; whose exhaustless energy is the ground of all finite existence; who is manifested in the Universe everywhere; and in adoring and loving whom, man finds the highest blessedness of his soul.

"I understand by God," says Spinoza, "the Infinite and Absolute Being, independent and self-existent, possessing infinite attributes, each one

of which expresses his eternal and infinite essence." *

"Whatever exists, exists in God, and without God nothing can exist, or be conceived of." †

"God acts solely from the laws of his own nature, free from all external restraints." ‡

"God is the permanent and indwelling cause of all things; not the transient and temporary cause." §

"God is the efficient cause not only of the existence of the Universe, but of its essence." ||

We thus see by quotations from his own writings, that Spinoza, by no fair construction, can be liable to the accusation of atheism. It may be said, however, that if he maintains the existence of God, he deprives him of his essential attributes; that if he be not an atheist, he is a pantheist.

By pantheism, in the sense in which that word is commonly used, though very improperly, is understood the confounding of the Deity with the material universe. This doctrine represents God as a being devoid of intelligence, acting by mechanical laws, and differing, in no respect, from the manifold whole which we call visible nature.

* *Opera*, Ethica, pars i. def. 6. † Ibid. prop. xv.
‡ Ibid. prop. xvii. § Ibid. prop. xviii. || Ibid. prop. xxv.

This is the view, I am told, that is held by some individuals who are regarded as atheists among ourselves. It is a view which is vulgarly ascribed to Spinoza; but without the slightest reason. In this sense, he was not a pantheist. The idle story which you quote from Le Clerc, that Meyer [not Mayer] induced Spinoza to substitute the word God for Nature, where the former now appears, is without foundation. Even if it had more satisfactory external evidence for its support, it would be contradicted by the whole spirit of Spinoza's writings. The substitution of the word Nature for God could not now be made without destroying his system. You will perceive this from the following passages, which I cannot but think have escaped your notice.

"My ideas of Nature and of God are indeed widely different from those defended by modern Christians. I maintain that God is the permanent and indwelling cause of all things, not the transient and temporary cause. All things, I say, are in God, and move in God; this I affirm with Paul, and perhaps also with all the ancient philosophers, although not in their sense; and I might even say, with all the ancient Hebrews, as far as can be conjectured from certain traditions, although variously corrupted. But as to the opinion of some persons, who think I have maintained the doc-

trine that God and Nature, (by which they understand a certain mass, or corporeal matter,) are one and the same, — they are entirely out of the way, (*tota errant via.*")*

"Thought is one of the infinite attributes of God, which expresses his eternal and infinite essence, or God is a thinking being. This proposition is evident from the fact, that we can conceive of an infinite thinking being. For the more objects of thought are possessed by a thinking being, the more reality and perfection do we conceive that being to possess; the being, therefore, who possesses infinite objects of thought, is necessarily infinite in the power of thinking. Since, then, by attending to thought alone, we conceive of an infinite being, thought is necessarily one of the infinite attributes of God."†

"The intelligence and will which we should regard as constituting the essence of God, must differ entirely from human intelligence and will. The intelligence of God, so far as it is conceived as constituting the essence of God, is indeed the cause both of the essence and of the existence of the Universe. The intelligence of God, then, is the cause both of the essence and the existence of our intelligence; and must therefore differ

* *Opera*, Epistola xxi. † Ethica, pars ii. prop. i.

from it, as that which is caused differs from its cause, namely, in that which it receives from its cause." *

"God necessarily has the idea both of his own essence, and of every thing which necessarily follows from his essence. The vulgar understand by the power of God an arbitrary will [*liberam voluntatem*, a will free from the everlasting laws of wisdom and justice], but we have shown that God acts with the same necessity [the same adherence to the laws of his own infinite nature] with which HE KNOWS HIMSELF; that is, as it follows from the necessity of the divine nature, that God should know himself, by the same necessity, it follows that he should act in an infinite variety of modes." †

You will now perceive that Spinoza was not an atheist, in any sense; nor a pantheist, in the sense in which that word is commonly used. He was a pantheist, in the philosophical sense only; by this is meant, that he denied real, substantial existence to finite objects; all apparent life is in truth the divine life; "the fulness of Him, who filleth all in all"; the spirit of his system is expressed in the sublime Hebrew ascription, "THOU ART, and beside thee there is none else." But no

* Ethica, pars i. prop. xvii. † Ibid. pars i. prop. iii.

one, who understands the subject, will accuse this doctrine of an irreligious tendency. It is religious even to mysticism; on that account, as well as for certain philosophical objections, it labors under, I cannot adopt it, as a theory of the Universe; but I trust I shall never cease to venerate the holy and exalted spirit of its author, who, in the meek simplicity of his life, the transparent beauty of his character, and the pure devotion with which he wooed truth, even as a bride, stands almost "alone and unapproached" among men.

You may possibly imagine that my respect for the personal virtues of Spinoza has betrayed me into an erroneous view of the character of his system. It may be worth while, therefore, to fortify my statements by a reference to some of the principal authorities in the authentic history of opinions.

"That Spinoza was no atheist," says Herder, "appears from every page of his writings. The idea of God is to him the first and the last; nay, the single idea, with which he connects the knowledge of Nature and of the Universe, the consciousness of himself and of every thing around him, and his system of Ethics and Politics. Without the conception of God, his soul is nothing, and can do nothing, not even conceive of itself. It seems strange and almost incomprehensible to

him, how men could have regarded God, only as a consequence, as it were, of other truths, nay, of sensible observation, since all truth, no less than all existence, is derived from an eternal, self-subsisting truth, from the Infinite and Eternal existence of God. This conception is cherished by Spinoza, with such an inward and vital earnestness, that I should esteem him rather an enthusiast for the existence of God, than a doubter or denier of it. In the knowledge and love of God, he places all the perfection, virtue, and happiness of man; and that this is no mask, but the conviction of the philosopher, is shown by his letters, I might indeed say, by the smallest fragment of his philosophical system, by every line that he has written. He may, it is true, have erred in his idea of God; but how readers of his works could say, that he has denied the idea of God, and maintained atheism, is utterly incomprehensible." *

"The system of Spinoza," says Tennemann, one of the soundest thinkers that ever wrote on the history of philosophy, "according to the spirit and purpose of its author, is not atheism, although at first it was regarded as such by most of his ad-

* Herder's *Gott*, Werke, vol. ix. pp. 132, 133.

versaries, rather from personal hatred than from insight into his character."*

"That Spinoza's system," says Rixner, a later writer of a different school, "according to the peculiar view of its author, is not a system of atheism, is evident."†

"The system of Spinoza," says Francke, one of his ablest critics, "cannot be called atheism. The atheist denies an intelligent cause of the Universe. Spinoza asserts the existence of an indwelling cause of the Universe, to whom he attributes infinite thought."‡

"With all the defects of his system," says Krause, "Spinoza cannot be designated as an atheist, a teacher of no God, nor as a pantheist, (if by pantheism, we mean the doctrine that the world itself, considered as the sum total of finite things is God); besause God is to him the principle and the only substantial ground of all science; and absolutely nothing finite is God."§

"It is clear," says Krug, a writer who never hesitates to give a hard name where there is just occasion, "that Spinoza cannot be numbered

* Tennemann's *Grundriss*, (Wendt's Ed.) p. 379.

† Rixner's *Handbuch der Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. iii. p. 79.

‡ Francke's *Versuch über die neuern Schicksale des Spinozismus*, p. 22.

§ Krause's *Grundwahrheiten der Wissenschaft*, p. 339.

among atheists, either practical or theoretical. For he does not deny the existence of God, but, on the contrary, expressly acknowledges God as an intelligent being, and the cause of all things. The question between him and his adversaries, many of whom were far below him both intellectually and morally, turns on a speculative point, namely, Is God the permanent and indwelling cause, or the transient and temporary cause of the universe? Every answer given to this question involves our limited understanding in inextricable difficulties. In a practical point of view, accordingly, we may prefer one answer to another. But because a man has a different opinion from ourselves on this question, we ought not to call him an atheist. This is always uncharitable, and indicates a heart which itself is not yet penetrated with the spirit of true religion."*

The authority of the most eminent living French writers on the history of philosophy is on the same side.

"Instead of accusing Spinoza of atheism," says Cousin, "we ought rather to bring the contrary reproach;" namely, that of allowing substantial and real existence to God alone, and "regarding man and nature as mere phenomena."†

* Krug's *Encyklopädisch-philosophisches Lexicon*, vol. iii. p. 836.

† Cousin, *Histoire de la Philosophie*, vol. i. pp. 465, 466.

"So far from being an atheist, as has been pretended, Spinoza has such a deep sense of the existence of God, that he loses all sense of the existence of man. This temporary and limited existence, like every thing finite, appeared to him unworthy the name of existence; and in his sight there is no true, substantial being, but the Eternal Being. His book, all bristling as it is with geometrical formulas, so dry and repulsive in its style, is, in fact, a mystic hymn, an ejaculation of the soul towards the Being, who alone is authorized to say I AM THAT I AM. Spinoza is a Persian Sufi, an enthusiastic monk; and the author whom this reputed atheist most resembles is the unknown author of 'The Imitation of Jesus Christ.'" *

"It may be supposed," says Jouffroy, "that it follows from the first principles of this system, that the Universe is God, or that God is the aggregate of existing things. Not so. Spinoza decidedly rejects this idea. The thought of God has the property not only of representing all his other attributes and their modes, but also of representing itself. God, in other words, has, for the object of thought, not only his own essence, and every thing which proceeds from it, but also his

* COUSIN, *Fragments Philosophiques*, (3d Edit.) vol. ii. pp. 164, 165, 166.

thought itself. Otherwise his ideas would be less comprehensive than his nature, and he would be ignorant of one of his own attributes, namely, intelligence. The divine thought, accordingly, is conscious of itself, and its modifications, as it knows all the other attributes of God."*

We thus see to what extent your account of Spinoza can be relied on. Let us now pass to your remarks concerning Schleiermacher.

You represent Schleiermacher, as one of "the most noted of the modern German school of infidelity," as a pantheist, as a denier of the immortality of the soul, and as an admirer of Spinoza. (pp. 43, 44.) The latter charge need not be set aside, for the disinterested tribute of one original man to another is always gratifying, and speaks well for the character of both. You attempt to support your allegations by the citation of detached passages from one of Schleiermacher's earliest writings, without the qualifications which guard them where they stand, and without any reference to his subsequent productions, in which his theological views are more fully and distinctly expressed. In this way, you have presented an erroneous idea of his position as a theologian,

* Jouffroy, *Droit Naturel*, vol. i. pp. 170, 172.

and treated with injustice the character of one of the most sincere and exemplary men, who have ever devoted their lives to the service of truth.

In the first place, you speak of the work to which you refer, as containing "an elaborate system," "drawn out" for the purpose of exhibiting the conceptions of the author in regard to Christianity. This is a misapprehension of the design of the book. An accurate knowledge of the literary history of the period, in which it was written, would have prevented the mistake. The "Discourses on Religion" were not intended to present a system of theology. They are highly rhetorical in their manner, filled with bursts of impassioned eloquence, always intense and sometimes extravagant, addressed to the feelings, not to speculation, and expressly disclaiming all pretensions to an exposition of doctrine. They were published at a time when hostility to religion, and especially to Christianity as a divine revelation, was deemed a proof of talent and refinement. The influence of the church was nearly exhausted; the highest efforts of thought were of a destructive character; a frivolous spirit pervaded society; religion was deprived of its supremacy; and a "starveling theology" was exalted in the place of the living word. Schleiermacher could not contemplate the wretched

meagerness and degradation of his age, without being moved as by "a heavenly impulse." His spirit was stirred within him as he saw men turning from the true God to base idols. He felt himself impelled to go forth, with the power of a fresh and youthful enthusiasm, for the restoration of religion; to present it in its most sublime aspect, free from its perversions, disentangled from human speculation, as founded in the essential nature of man, and indispensable to the complete unfolding of his inward being. In order to recognise every thing which is really religion among men, and to admit even the lowest degrees of it into the idea of religion, he wished to make this as broad and comprehensive in its character as possible.* "Religion," says Coleridge, "in its widest sense, signifies the act and habit of reverencing the Invisible, as the highest both in ourselves and in nature." It is in this sense that the word religion is used throughout the "Discourses;" and nothing, accordingly, could have been further from the author's intention, than to present any thing like an elaborate or complete system of speculative doctrine. He addresses himself to the educated men of Germany, not with a

* See Lücke's *Erinnerungen*, translated in the *Christian Examiner*, vol. xx. pp. 17, 18.

view to gain their assent to a theological creed, but to touch the springs of their better nature, to rebuke their proud disdain of divine things, and, like the great moral poet of England,

> To arouse the sensual from their sleep
> Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
> To noble raptures.

"I know," says he, "that it is quite as little your custom to honor the Deity in the holy stillness of retirement, as to frequent his deserted temples. I know that in your decorated dwellings no other sacred things are to be found, than the wise oracles of our sages, and the glorious creations of our artists; that society and humanity, science and art, so far as you deem them worthy of your attention, have so completely engrossed your minds, as to leave no room for the Eternal and Infinite One, who exists for you beyond the limits of the visible world. I know how admirably you have succeeded in giving such a rich and comprehensive culture to the present earthly life, that you appear to have no need of Eternity; that having created a Universe for yourselves, you are now absolved from thinking of him who created you. Of all these things I am perfectly sensible. And yet, commanded by an inward and irresistible necessity, I feel constrained

to speak, as by an impulse from on high. I cannot take back my request, that you above all others should hear what I have to say." * "I maintain that piety is the necessary and spontaneous product of the depths of every elevated nature; that it possesses a rightful claim to a peculiar province in the soul, over which it may exercise an unlimited sovereignty; that it is worthy, by its intrinsic power, to be a source of life to the most noble and exalted minds; and that, from its essential character, it deserves to be known and received by them. These are the points which I defend, and which I would fain establish. I leave it with you to decide, whether it be worth your while to listen to me, before you are still more strengthened in your contempt for religion." †

Such an undertaking would almost of necessity preclude all systematic theological discussion. We find, accordingly, that this is the case. Still, you charge the author with denying the doctrine both of a personal God and of personal immortality. You were probably led into this error by failing to notice the object of the work, which was not to examine the truth or falsehood of any abstract conceptions, but to show that so far as

* *Reden über die Religion*, pp. 1, 2. † *Ibid.* p. 25.

they were MERELY SPECULATIVE, limited to the sphere of science, without influence on the feelings, they were not ESSENTIAL to the life of religion within the soul. The popular representations of God and of immortality present difficulties to every reflecting mind; they are founded, to a great extent, on the analogy of human relations; it has always been an important problem to separate between the true and the false in these representations; for my own part, I cannot conceive of a thoughtful, religious man, in our day, whom this problem has not exercised; nor can I believe that one who comprehends the subject will make any specific solution indispensable to true piety. This is a prominent view in Schleiermacher's "Discourse." It was his aim to show that the essence of religion is independent of speculation; that the heart is its seat, not the head; that we need not by "searching to find out God, to understand the Almighty to perfection," before we can "worship him in spirit and truth." "The accusation of pantheism," says Lücke, "has been urged against Schleiermacher principally on account of these 'Discourses,' often in a thoughtless spirit, but sometimes with reflection and seriousness. The appearance, nay, here and there a decided expression, is certainly against him. But he only, who overlooks the peculiar object and

position of the "Discourses" in relation to their times, and confounds their merely external and adventitious details with their central principles; who regards as pantheism every profound and inward apprehension of the indissoluble connexion between God and the Universe, which exists in the religious nature, and prefers every chilling and mechanical view of the world as destitute of the agency of the living God to any softening and enlargement of his rigid and exclusive notions, can believe that pantheism was Schleiermacher's genuine and permanent opinion. At least, after what he has said himself in explanation of this subject in the third edition, it is impossible to repeat the charge without wilful unkindness." *

I regret that the explanations referred to are of such a length as to forbid their insertion in this place. It may be seen, however, from the following extract, that the conceptions which Schleiermacher renounces as essential to religion, are only those which are taken from human and earthly relations, and which consequently pervert every spiritual idea of God and immortality. "As the conception of the HUMAN personality of God usually presupposes a consciousness that is not

* *Erinnerungen*, translated in the *Christian Examiner*, vol. xx. p. 18.

morally pure, the same thing may be assumed in the conception of immortality, which represents it after the manner of the Elysian fields, only as a new earth of greater beauty and extent. And as we must admit an essential difference between the inability to form such a HUMAN and PERSONAL conception of God, and the denial of the existence of a LIVING GOD, — which last alone can be designated as atheism; in like manner, he who does not incline to such a MATERIAL CONCEPTION of immortality, is very far from discarding the GENUINE HOPE of immortality. And as we may call every man religious, who believes in a LIVING GOD, we may also call every one religious, who believes in the EVERLASTING LIFE OF THE SOUL, without wishing to define the way or the manner, in which it must be conceived." *

We come now to a still more extraordinary error, which arose probably from the habit, too prevalent among us, of grouping together theologians who have scarce any thing in common, but the language in which they write. You class Schleiermacher with the modern German school, whose disciples are called Rationalists or Naturalists. (pp. 43, 45.) Now although Schleiermacher attempted to modify the old Lutheran theology,

* *Reden*, p. 141.

on several important points, he was a strenuous advocate of the supernatural origin of Christianity; his whole life was a controversy against the Rationalist school; and his works are supposed to have contributed more than any thing else to its decline. If a foreign writer were to describe the celebrated Dr. Beecher, as one of "the most noted" of the Unitarian school in New-England, because he has been thought to question some of the principles of the prevailing orthodoxy, it would not be a more whimsical mistake, than to place Schleiermacher among the leaders of a party with which he sustained only the relation of uncompromising hostility. "It is perfectly easy," says Röhr, the most distinguished Rationalist preacher now living, "to comprehend the hatred of Schleiermacher and his school to Rationalism, the hereditary enemy of such a system as his." * "If the deistical Rationalism of the earlier schools of theology," says the orthodox Lücke, "has ever suffered prostration, it has suffered it from the great work of Schleiermacher, entitled 'Doctrines of the Christian Faith.' Much that professes to be a decided victory over it, it could have overcome, but it will never recover from the deadly wound, which has been inflicted on it, by the

* *Krit. Pred. Bib.*, vol. xix. p. 852.

truly rational, but not *rationalistic* Dogmatics of Schleiermacher."*

The theological views of Schleiermacher are little known in this country. His writings present no attractions for the superficial reader; they cannot be understood without profound reflection; but they are well worth the attention of our studious young men. If any are inclined to German Rationalism, they will here find a corrective; and it was probably with these convictions, that so much importance has been attached to the opinions of Schleiermacher by Professor Stuart of Andover, and by Dr. Leonard Woods, jr., late Professor at Bangor, now President of Bowdoin College. Those eminent scholars and theologians are, perhaps, better qualified to pronounce a correct judgment on the character and tendencies of German theology, than any other individuals in this country. They have made it the object of extensive and systematic study; their knowledge of it is not confined to imperfect information obtained from Encyclopædias and Reviews; and their ability to survey it as a whole leads them to form an accurate estimate of its separate portions. No one can suspect them of attachment to Ration-

* *Erinnerungen*, translated in the *Christian Examiner*, vol. xx. p. 31.

alism; on the contrary, they have been faithful and earnest in pointing out its character, and opposing its influence; but it is through their means chiefly, that Schleiermacher has been brought bebefore the notice of the community; they have found in his opinions a support of the orthodox faith. At the same time, they have encouraged an acquaintance with German theological writers of different schools; no idle terrors have scared them away from the pursuit of truth; and their hearty and scholarlike liberality in this respect may rebuke those of us, who, with greater pretensions to freedom, have been less consistent in its exercise. The same spirit prevails at the Theological Seminary, which has long borne the reproach of being firmly anchored to a stationary theology. Widely as I dissent from the doctrinal creeds of that Institution, I cannot but recognise, with joy and honor, the spirit of Christian liberty, which suggested such language as follows. "We believe," say two of the Andover Professors in a recent publication, "that some among us are troubled over much about the speculative notions of the day. It is well to be cautious, — not so well to be in a fright. It is a good thing to give heed lest the spirit of our religion be circumscribed or expelled; but it is needless to raise a panic because one man prefers this mode and

another that of explaining the one faith. Let not the grasshopper become a burden to us, while we are so young a people. — Let us see how men good and true are now speculating in foreign climes, and we shall be convinced that the sky does not close in with the earth four or five miles from the spot where we happen to stand, however central that spot may be. There are things in the world that we have never yet heard of." *

According to Schleiermacher, the revelation of God in nature, and in the human soul, is only a preparation for a perfect revelation through Christ. The purpose of God in the creation of man is completed in the Christian revelation. This is a new, original communication of divine truth, a fresh manifestation of the divine life in the person and works of Jesus Christ. He is appointed by God to be the Redeemer of the world; hence he needed not redemption himself; and, agreeably to the universal doctrine of the Church, was originally distinguished from all other men, and endowed with divine power from his birth.†

The opinions of the school founded by Schleiermacher concerning Rationalism and Supernatural-

* *Selections from German Literature*, by B. B. Edwards and E. A. Park, pp. 11, 12.

† See *Christliche Glaube*, vol. i. chap. i. sect. ii.

See also Rätze's *Erläuterungen*, pp. 113 – 118.

ism can hardly be better expressed than in the following passage from Ullmann.*

* Ullmann, one of the most independent, moderate, and discriminating followers of Schleiermacher, I rejoice to perceive, is beginning to attract the attention of theologians in this country. He richly deserves to be studied, and cannot but exert a purifying influence on every mind conversant with his writings. The views, which he maintains with admirable clearness and strength in the Treatise entitled "The Sinless Character of Jesus," (translated in the "Selections from German Literature," by Professors Edwards and Park,) are adapted to convince many of the truth of Christianity, whom the external evidences, so called, have no power to affect. I cannot resist the temptation to introduce here, though somewhat out of place, the following exposition of the value of the argument from miracles, as held by the school of Schleiermacher. "The nature of the case and the necessities of their contemporaries fully justified the Apostles in proving the divine mission and the Messiahship of Jesus by the argument from miracles and prophecy. But the necessity of the times and of individuals may in this respect vary; and although the Gospel in its *essence* always remains the same, and contains eternal, unchangeable truth, yet in a different age, a different method of proof may lead more immediately to the acknowledgment of this truth. In our own time, it seems proper to fix our eyes especially on the spiritual character of Jesus, in order to obtain satisfactory proof of the divinity of his mission and instructions; not because the Apostolical mode of proof has become untenable, but because this other mode has a more vital efficacy on account of the style of education prevalent at the present day. We live among contemporaries to whom miracles are more a ground of doubt than of faith; we should not forget that the proof from miracles exerts its full power, properly speaking, on none but the eye-witnesses of them, and conducts us to the desired conclusion only by a circuitous path. On the other hand, a vivid apprehension of the inward character of Jesus brings us nearer to the operative centre of Christi-

"Supernaturalism in its exclusive character, particularly as it has heretofore been exhibited, regards revelation as an isolated, historical fact, attested by prophecies and miracles, contained in

anity, and at the same time, makes us feel the influence of the moral power, which goes forth from that centre. Here faith in Jesus rests immediately on himself; it is free, spiritual confidence in his person." PROFESSOR PARK'S *Translation*, pp. 391, 392.

I subjoin the remarks of the Translator, to which I would invite the reader's special attention. It is gratifying, I confess, to find so decided a confirmation of the doctrine, which has been reproached as infidelity, from a source which, I presume, labors under no such suspicion.

"The argument from miracles," says Professor Park, "is not the kind of proof to which the majority of cordial believers in the Bible are, at the present day, most attached. They have neither the time nor the ability to form an estimate of the historical evidence, that favors or opposes the actual occurrence of miracles. They know the Bible to be true, because they feel it to be so. The excellence of its morality, like a magnet, attracts their souls; and sophistry, which they cannot refute, will not weaken their faith, resulting as it does from the ACCORDANCE OF THEIR HIGHER NATURE WITH THE SPIRIT OF THE BIBLE. The internal argument in favor of Christianity is also recommended by its moral influence. The full exhibition of it is a melting appeal to the heart; and as the heart becomes the more susceptible, the argument becomes the more convincing. With the unlettered Christian, then, the moral evidence for the Bible is the more effectual, because the more simple; with the educated Christian it is so, because the more dignified. It may be questioned, indeed, *whether the argument from miracles is not* LOGICALLY DEPENDENT, *for its complete force, on its* CONNEXION *with the argument from the* MORAL NATURE *of Christianity.*"—*Selections from German Literature*, p. 454.

an infallible form, in the Scriptures, from which its truths are to be derived, merely by the application of historical and grammatical interpretation and the rules of logic. Its defect is, that it teaches a revelation, which was made merely as a mechanical system, (Deus ex machina,) destitute of any vital connexion with nature and history, nay, in decided opposition to both; which contradicts reason, or at least is so foreign to it, that the province of reason in the appropriation and working up of its truths is merely formal; that reason at most can establish the reality of inspiration and revelation, but can by no means make out the inward truth of that which is revealed, or which proceeds from inspiration.

"Rationalism, on the other hand, in its exclusive character, rejects the belief in an immediate, divine revelation in general; and substitutes reason in its place, as the only essential source of knowledge; but allows to historical revelation, so far as it admits the name, the only merit of introducing the most important truths of reason, and collecting an ecclesiastical community for their support. Its defect is, that it knows nothing of a divine revelation, in the full sense of the word; that regarding Christianity only as an historical, human, natural phenomenon, it denies its divine origin, and strips it of its highest dignity;

that, taking for granted, without just grounds, the perfect soundness and absolute sufficiency of reason, in its present state, and often confounding it with the lower faculty of the understanding, it makes it the only source of divine knowledge, and the ultimate arbiter in matters of faith.

"Both systems, in this form, have evidently produced injurious effects; the former has reduced theology to an external and unscientific character, and converted the examination of doctrines into the criticism of words; the latter has deprived Christianity of its intrinsic character, treated its history in an arbitrary manner, and failed to satisfy the wants of faith and of the deeper religious feelings. But we must also allow to each system its peculiar merits. Supernaturalism has guarded the essential truths of Christianity; Rationalism has maintained the rights of scientific investigation; we owe to the former, that, without a total interruption of scientific progress, we are returning to a more complete recognition of the characteristic truths of Christianity, and of the historical elements of religion in general; we owe to the latter, that the faith in revelation, which is now forming in theology, must necessarily be scientific, conscious of the internal truth of the doctrines which it accepts.

"But we must make a broad distinction be-

tween Rationalism, as a merely temporary system, and rationality, as the subjection to reason, and the constitutive essence of science. In like manner, we must make a broad distinction between Supernaturalism, as a temporary form, and the faith in revelation which is essential to Christianity, and which cannot be separated from it, but with the loss of its fundamental characteristics."

A sound theology, according to Schleiermacher and Ullmann, must combine all that is valuable in both systems, reject their exclusive and extravagant tendencies of each, and thus obtain a higher view of divine truth, than was presented by either doctrine in itself. The manner in which this is to be accomplished will appear from what follows. "The true medium, which results from the process of reconciliation, is not merely the general negation of error, or a spectral indifference between the extremes; not any thing abstract or barren; but a positive reception of the whole truth, and the most complete development of it on every side. The highest and most comprehensive truth of the divine life in the soul of man reposes in Christ. He in his complete personality, divine and human at once, in the untroubled, undiminished fulness of his being, is, in the highest sense, the true medium, the mediator between Divinity and Humanity, the central point

of the world's history, the exhaustless fountain of all progressive spiritual life; he, who is made to us not only redemption, but wisdom; in whom God not only was, and reconciled the world to himself, but who also, revealing the divine light and life, could say of himself, 'I am the truth, which maketh free; I am the light of the world, and he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness.'" *

Such is the design and endeavor of what may be called the leading school in modern German theology. The impression of the powerful genius of Schleiermacher is every where visible on its character; but it includes no servile disciples; it combines men of free minds, who respect each other's efforts, whatever may be their individual conclusions; and the central point at which they meet is the acknowledgment of the divine character of Christ, the divine origin of his religion, and its adaptation to be the faith of the world, when presented in a form corresponding with its inherent spirit, and with the scientific culture of the present age. There are few persons who would venture to charge such a school with the promulgation of infidelity; there are many, I

* See Ullmann's *Über Partei and Schule,* in *Stud. und Krit.* vol. i. 1836.

doubt not, who will welcome its principles, as soon as they are understood, as the vital, profound, and ennobling theology, which they have earnestly sought for, but hitherto sought in vain.

I would gladly pass over, without comment, the notices you have given of De Wette. They need no critical exposure to show to every German scholar the propriety of the authoritative tone, in which you speak of German theology. And never is it a grateful task to diminish the confidence which may be reposed in a teacher, by those with whom the expression of his opinion has the weight of an oracle. The accuracy and fairness of a scholar are too tender points to be even lightly touched, though they may be subject to well-founded suspicion, unless there be an imperative reason, almost amounting to necessity, to forego the scruples of delicacy, and sacrifice reserve to justice. If, therefore, I consulted my own feelings alone, I should leave those notices in silence. If they were merely the errors of frailty, and not sins of presumption, I could not prevail on myself to point out their character.

But when you discuss elaborate works in a few lines, with the pretension of superior knowledge; when you charge those, who find "meaning" and sense in favorite writers, with "vague and in-

consistent conceptions;" when you accuse one of the most illustrious theologians of the age with "unformed notions" and "incoherent ideas;" when you venture to intimate that one of the noblest and purest of men is guilty of deception and folly; it is necessary to remind you that by such personalities you injure yourself; and that the absurdities, which you present as the opinions of De Wette, are due not to the author, but to his translator.

Your quotations from De Wette contain nearly *twenty-one* lines; your translation of those twenty-one lines contains *fourteen* errors. Some of these errors pervert the sense of the original; others are merely ludicrous; all, such as even a superficial acquaintance with the language might have prevented. A knowledge of German is no merit; but the want of it in those who undertake to expound German theology is an inconvenience. Your decisions on this subject will, no doubt, be respected by the community, according to their value.

I need not go over these errors individually; philology is not my present subject; I will allude to those only which make De Wette assert what he would himself disclaim.

According to your translation, De Wette says, "that the main business of his theological life has been the establishment of the idea, that the es-

sence of what is proposed for religious faith is not in propositions which are *objects of knowledge*, but in a *pious apprehension of things*, purified and enlightened by knowledge."

It is not surprising, that "the shadowy meaning of this sentence should escape in any attempt to grasp it."

De Wette, however, who, for a German, is a singularly perspicuous writer, expresses himself with sufficient clearness in the original. He says that theology has been too much under the influence of scholastic metaphysics; that it has been made to consist in abstract systems of philosophy, rather than in the exposition of religious ideas; and that "its essence is not in *scientific propositions* (wissenschaftlichen Sätzen,) but in the *pious consciousness*, purified and enlightened by the influence of science, (in dem wissenschaftlich gereinigten und erleuchteten frommen Bewusstseyn.")

To assert that a sound theology should express, in a systematic form, the ideas which are at the foundation of personal religious experience, is very different from saying, "that its essence is not in propositions which are *objects of knowledge*."

You make De Wette say, that "we should not rest the truth of Christian faith, *as if it were a* DUTY *to do so*, on common, naked, historical truth."

De Wette actually says, that "we should not rest the truth of Christian faith on common, naked, historical truth, *as if it were a* LEGAL TITLE, (etwa wie ein Recht;") or as he had said a few pages before, "the historical faith of Christians, according to the old system, rests on the Bible, as its source, very much as the common civil law is founded on the *Corpora Juris.*" He opposes this literal, mechanical adherence to the words of history, as if they were to be construed with the formal precision of a legal code; and no critical student of the New Testament, I presume, will differ from him in this opinion.

You make De Wette say, that "theology should renounce, what has hitherto been customary, the *poor and unscientific appeal* to miraculous evidence."

De Wette actually says, that "theology should renounce the miserable and unscientific *mode of conducting* the argument from miracles, that has hitherto been usual, (die bisher gewöhnliche so kleinliche und unwissenschaftliche Führung des Wunderbeweises.")

You make him say, that the argument from miracles should be renounced; he actually says, that it should not be conducted in the miserable and unscientific mode that has been usual. The importance of this is deeply felt by many theolo-

gians beside De Wette. Still they value the miracles, when presented in their true light. They would not renounce all appeal to the evidence derived from them. Neither would De Wette. His writings are full of examples to show the power with which the Divinity of Christ is illustrated by his miracles.

You make De Wette say, that "the last office of an improved theology is to make the *might* of the *community of Christians* again effective, and to plant faith in living power in the living life."

De Wette actually says, that "an improved theology should restore the *importance of Christian communion*, (mache wieder Wichtigkeit der christlichen Gemeinschaft geltend,) and plant faith in its vital power in actual life, (in lebendiger Kraft in das lebendige Leben.")

The ordinances of the Church have fallen into unmerited neglect; an improved theology would give them a new significance; excite a deeper interest in their observance; and restore them to their place in the concerns of life, and the affections of Christians. This is a favorite idea with De Wette, and one surely which calls for no very severe condemnation.

I ought not, perhaps, to leave this topic, without showing the injustice you have been guilty of,

in classing De Wette with the Naturalist School. To do this, I should need only to adduce passages from almost any one of his writings; but I am spared the task, by the careful and discriminating account of De Wette's theology, which is already before the public in one of our religious Journals.*

I have now expressed some of the thoughts and feelings, which the perusal of your Discourse has awakened. I have used great plainness of speech, for I knew that it was demanded by the cause which I have at heart. If, in any of my remarks, I have been betrayed into a vehemence unsuited to the grave importance of the subject, I beg that it may be ascribed not to zeal for any private opinions, but to a wakeful jealousy for the honor of liberal Christianity, for the rights of Protestant freedom, and for the interests of good learning and a progressive theology. I need not say that I have no desire to impart my own speculative convictions to your mind, or to any other, except so far as they shall appear to be true in the light

* See *Christian Examiner*, vol. xxiv. pp. 137 – 171; vol. xxv. pp. 1 – 23. The author despatches the part of the subject alluded to above with commendable brevity. "Some writers persist in calling De Wette a Naturalist. There is no doctrine that he more strongly opposes than Naturalism."

of the fullest, freest, and most independent inquiry. A dead level of uniform opinions must be dreaded by every earnest seeker of truth; no man has the whole, but each a part, of reality; and a friendly comparison of ideas from different points of observation, as it is the most delightful mental exercise, is also the most certain means of avoiding error, and of building up a comprehensive faith on a strong foundation. If your Discourse had contained nothing but a manly and temperate defence of your peculiar opinions, however exceptionable they may be, I should not have felt called upon to question their truth; they might safely have been submitted to the judgment of an intelligent community, which is more disposed to examine ideas, than to take them on trust; but when, in your attachment to an uncertain theory, you lose sight of the basis of our Christian union, and advance principles which have been repudiated by our churches, which are at war with the spirit of society among us, and which threaten, if carried into effect, to disorganize and confound our dearest religious institutions, I have found it impossible to keep silence. It seemed to me that, if even the humblest friend of religious freedom should hold his peace, the very stones would cry out.

In regard to the denunciation, towards the close of your Discourse, which you have skilfully couched in the form of a solemn warning or appeal, there is but one opinion, I am sure, which any just mind, that understands its import and application, can cherish. I have only a single remark to offer concerning it. It was out of place. It should have been addressed to the congregations of those "treacherous," "pretended Christian teachers, who disbelieve the divine origin and authority of Christianity, and would undermine the belief of others," since they do not receive Christianity on the evidence which you prescribe as "probable." Sir, those teachers do not acknowledge your authority. If, as you broadly intimate, "the fear of God and the awful realities of the future world" have no influence over them, they cannot be expected "to stop short in their course" at your bidding. They will not obey your commands. You cannot succeed with them. You must go to their congregations. You must appeal to those among whom they live, who know them and who are known of them. You must tell those, in the service of whose souls they have grown gray, that the pastor, who breaks to them the bread of life, is an infidel; that the friend, who has wept with them in their grief, and rejoiced in their joy, is a hypocrite; that the teach-

er, who has directed their inquiries, resolved their doubts, quickened their intellect, given a new impulse to their moral nature, and ever pointed them to the cross of Christ as the hope of the world, is a blind guide, believing nothing himself, and destroying the faith of his flock. If you can persuade their congregations that your exclusive doctrine is correct, they are bound to sever the ties which unite them to their pastors; to surrender the freedom which they have long enjoyed; to return to the old order of things; to cease to judge for themselves the qualifications of their teachers; and to establish a hierarchy, whose parchment and ribbons shall form the credentials of the minister, instead of the "anointing of the Holy Ghost."

Sir, our community of liberal Christians are not prepared for this. I know that individuals may have felt alarm at the progress of thought, and on hearing the utterance of novel opinions have sometimes wondered "whereunto these things would grow." The great body of our people, however, have never been disturbed. They attach little importance to the outcry either of agitators or alarmists. They have no fear of heresy, where thought is left free. They believe that the discussion of opinions is the best antidote to error. Above all, they have an instinctive aversion to the

denouncing of a man's character, on account of his sober and honest convictions. They judge the tree by its fruits. They have long been taught "that goodness consists in being good." It is a doctrine which they approve, and on which they will practise. You will find it hard to persuade them, that a doubtful speculation in theology is essential to the character of the Christian, "that where the pulse of virtue beats in the life, the power of religion is dead at the heart."

I have said, that they do not wish for restrictions on freedom of speech. But this is not all. They desire its actual exercise. They have no respect for the man, who hides his thought. They know too well the value of liberty, lightly to renounce it, for themselves or for their pastors. They wish for no slaves in the pulpit; for no cowards, or sluggards to stand on the watch-tower, and look for light. In the general fermentation of modern times, they are aware of the danger of artificial restraints. They know "that the best way to keep things safe is to give them vent." With few exceptions, this is the universal feeling. I have the strongest confidence in the attachment of our community to the first principles of liberal Christianity. When the question is made concerning those principles, almost every man among us, ministers and people, will be found

in his place. They may greatly differ in speculative opinions; but when the controversy comes to the right of utterance, without fear of denunciation, they are true as steel to this cardinal point. Often have they been tried; never long found wanting. In the words of one, whom I may not speak of here as the feelings of personal friendship would prompt, they will ever declare, when warned of the peril of freedom of mind and of progress in religion, "our prayer to God is, that it may never stop. We have too much confidence in Providence and in human nature to sympathize with those who

> grow pale
> Lest their own judgments should become too bright,
> And their free thoughts be crimes, and earth have too much light.

A spirit is abroad, free, bold, uncompromising, and terrible as an army with banners, which is trying the opinions and institutions of the world as by fire. It is the duty of the wise and good to endeavor to guide this spirit, to restrain its excesses, and above all to imbue it with a sincere and earnest love of truth, humanity, and God. But we fear not the issue. We believe that every occasion of new light and intelligence will be found to illustrate and enforce the evidences of the Christian

revelation, and give mankind a deeper and more living sense of its truth and reality."

I am, &c.,

AN ALUMNUS OF THE

CAMBRIDGE THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL.

BOSTON, *September* 5, 1839.